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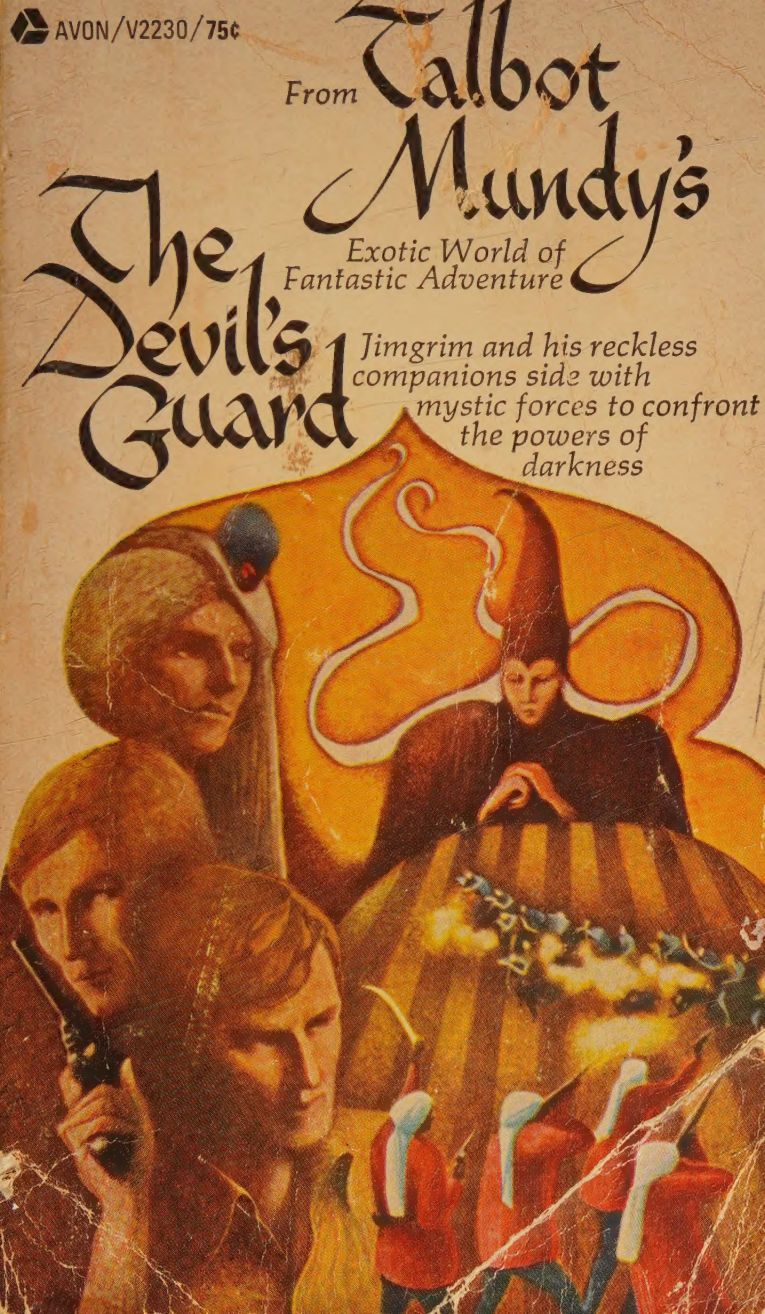

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The
Devil's
Guard

THE DEVIL'S GUARD

We remark upon the slowness of the snail and of the tortoise, but the processes of evolution are incomparably more slow, so that they escape our observation altogether. None the less, we are evolving, although few of us as we suppose. For supposition is the fume of decomposing vanity—the instrument by which the Devil's Guard beclouds that road on which we are ascending, lest we see too much and so imagine ourselves gods before the devil in us is evaporated.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER ONE

CHULLUNDER GHOSE SHOOTS SHREWDLY WITH THE OTHER BARREL OF HIS GUN.

I FIND myself wondering why I should go to the trouble to write what few men will believe. Why do we try to leave records behind us? Why not wait until I meet old friends again on the bank beyond the river, when we can compare notes and laugh at the amateur drama we all combined to spoil with such enthusiasm? Frankly, I don't know. The impulse is to set down an account of this adventure, in spite of the uncertainty that it will ever reach the United States.

I am writing in a draughty cave, in a temperature that numbs fingers, freezes ink at intervals and makes concentration on the task extremely difficult to a man unused to writing anything but field reports on mines and ordinary business letters. The sheets of this manuscript are fluttering under the stones I have to use as paper-weights; my feet are nearly frozen in a fur bag filled with yak-dung; I am filthy from weeks without washing, and extremely sore from bruises, as well as suffering from what I think is indigestion, due to bad food. Moreover, Jimgrim is not here. He has a clearer brain than mine, a better memory and clearer judgment of essentials. I must tell the story to the best of my recollection without the advantage of comparing notes with him.

Jimgrim—born James Schuyler Grim, but known as Jimgrim all over the Near East, Arabia, parts of Africa, and from Dera Ismail Khan to Sikkim—has served in the Intelligence Departments of at least five nations, always reserving United States citizenship. He speaks a dozen languages so fluently that he can pass himself off as a native; and since he was old enough to build a fire and skin a rabbit the very midst of danger has been his goal, just as most folk spend their lives looking for safety and comfort. When he is what other men would reckon safe, the sheer discomfort of it bores him.

He is the best friend a man could have, the least talkative, the most considerate; and he seems to have no personal ambition—which, I suppose, is why the world rewarded him with colonelcies that he did not seek and opportunities for self-advancement that he never used. Jimgrim could have had anything he cared to ask for in the way of an administrative post; and, funnily enough, the one thing that he always wanted was denied him. From his youth he wished to be an actor. That he is one of exceeding merit, is beyond dispute; but, except for occasional amateur performances behind the lines of armies, he has never set foot on the stage.

He looks as if he were half-Cherokee, although I believe there is only a trace of red man in his ancestry. He has a smile that begins faintly at the corners of his eyes, hesitates there as if to make sure none will be offended by it, and then spreads until his whole face lights with humor, making you realize that he has understood your weakness and compared it with his own. If you have any self-respect at all you can't pick quarrels with a man who takes that view of life; the more he laughs at you, the more you warm toward him, since he is laughing at himself as well as you.

Grim and I were in Darjiling with our backs against the porch of a hotel from which the whole range of the Himalayas could be seen, on one of those rare days of autumn when there was neither rain nor mist. The peak of Kanchenjunga stood up sharp and glittering against a turquoise sky. In our ears was the roar of the Ranjeet River. In the distance, almost straight in front of us and looking, in that clear air, scarcely fifty miles away, was the outline of the frontier of Tibet.

We had returned, about a week before, from Assam, where I had gone to report on some oil indications. Grim, who made the trip with me, had amused himself by making Nepalis, Lepchas, Sikkimese and Bhutanis believe he was a Tibetan in disguise; and on the other hand, when he had met some old Tibetan pilgrims returning from India toward the Tse-tang Pass he had convinced them he was born in Sikkim. I have seen him play the same game frequently in Arab countries, using the dialect of one tribe to disguise from another such discrepancies of accent as might otherwise betray him.

We were not, I remember, talking. Grim is a man with whom you can sit for hours on end, saying nothing, enjoying his company. Our eyes were on that splendid panorama, neither of us at the moment guessing that our destiny would lead us across it and up to the roof of the world (but not back again). We cannot now go back to the friends we

knew and the world we have left behind; but, being at a loose end, we had been discussing, that morning, whether or not we should visit some friends in California.

It was Grim who spoke first, rolling a cigarette and setting his feet on the veranda rail, framing Kanchenjunga between them as if he were squinting at the mountain through a V sight.

"What next?" he asked.

I did not know. I was sick of business. Grim cares nothing about money, and I had made all I shall ever need; yet we were neither of us in the least disposed to loaf. Neither he nor I have any relatives who matter, we are both unmarried, we agree in loathing politics, and we are both verging on middle age—at that period of life, that is to say, when a man's real usefulness ought to begin. If a man hasn't acquired judgment and stability at forty-nine, he had better grow fat and keep out of the way.

I knew Grim had been into Tibet. He was with Younghusband's expedition, when he got himself into disfavor by ignoring the military problems he was there ostensibly to help clear up, and studying exclusively those apparently insignificant odds and ends, that, he maintains, are "the guts of things." I did not even guess that he was thinking about Tibet while he stared between his feet at Kanchenjunga.

Before I could answer him there came and sat beside us a small smart Englishman by the name of Dudley Tyne—not a man we knew well, nor knew very much about except that he was popular, reputed dangerous, and in some vague way connected with the Secretariat. He knew how to be tactfully agreeable, but the tact was almost overdone, with the result that one fell on guard against him, though without any definite sense of dislike. We invited him to drink, and for five or six minutes he talked about the mountain range that filled the whole horizon.

He used considerable subtlety in reaching his objective, which was information about Elmer Rait, an American of Columbus, Ohio, with whom I went to school, and with whom I was for several years in partnership until I decided it was not worth while to try to continue to get along with him. The things a man says don't matter much; it is the way he feels toward yourself and others, that makes him friend or not. Elmer Rait and I talked the same language, but thought from entirely opposed angles, and I came at last to the conclusion that he was rotten at the core, although he never did anything liable to get him into prison.

However, that was personal opinion. It was no excuse for telling tales against Rait, so I answered Mr. Tyne extremely

guardedly, obliging him to disclose his reasons for so many questions.

"Rait is in Tibet," he told me at last. "Our government has signed a treaty with Tibet. We recognize their right to keep strangers out of their country, and we've agreed to close the frontier. Rait has slipped through, which makes it awkward."

Grim was listening, his eyes still fixed on Kanchenjunga. I noticed that he took his feet down off the rail, but he threw away his cigarette and rolled another as if the conversation didn't interest him much.

"In what way are Rait's movements supposed to concern me?" I asked, expecting to be told that I would have to sign a promise not to try to cross the frontier—that being the Indian Government's usual method with individuals whose exact intentions are unknown. All governments lock stable doors immediately after a horse has bolted. I would have signed such a promise without question, but fortunately it had no more entered the heads of Anglo-Indian officials than it had mine that I might venture across the border.

"I was told you quarreled with Rait some years ago. I thought you might not object to giving us information," Tyne suggested.

I told him the exact truth; that I had none sufficiently recent to be of any use. It was seven years since I had seen or heard from Rait.

"He seems to know your whereabouts," Tyne answered. "Our information is that he wrote to you from Lhassa, sending the letter by hand to someone in Darjiling. Would you mind letting me see that letter?"

I told him I had not received it. His manners were irreproachable and he left us before long with the impression that he believed every word I said. As if to wipe away the least trace of official unpleasantness he begged us to join him at dinner that night at the club; and because we wished to show that we had not resented his questioning, Grim and I accepted.

While we were at dinner with him both our rooms in the hotel were searched and every single document in our possession was gone through thoroughly. To make the raid look plausible a watch-and-chain, a little money and some odds and ends of jewelry were stolen—all of which the police recovered for us next day with an alacrity and lack of fuss that was beyond all praise, but left no doubt as to who had searched our papers.

As we surveyed our upset luggage Grim looked at me and asked in the casual voice with which he hides emotion:

"Do you suppose Rait went to Tibet for his health? What about that? Like to look for him?"

I nodded. If memory serves, that was all the conferring we did as to whether or not we should follow Rait over the border. The very fact that his object in going was a mystery was enough to make us take the trail.

Tyne had asked us again and again to suggest to him who might be the individual to whom Rait would direct a letter for delivery to me. We had not even tried to imagine who it might be. But now, as we looked at our clothes scattered over the floor, and realized that we had been invited out to dinner that the spies might search our rooms without risk of disturbance, we did some thinking, thought of the same man simultaneously and both spoke at once:

"Chullunder Ghose!"

There was nobody else in Darjiling whom Rait would dare to trust and who, at the same time, was known to Rait to have been more or less in my confidence. True, Grim and I had been in Darjiling for several days since our return from Assam, and Chullunder Ghose had neither presented himself nor sent a messenger; but the fat babu, supposing it was he who had received Rait's letter, would be the last person on earth to betray its whereabouts to the authorities by any sort of hasty movement.

Said Grim: "If the babu has that letter, he has read it. Probably he hopes to keep its contents to himself."

Nevertheless, we made no move until the day following, after the police had brought back our stolen trinkets. We did not even discuss the subject, but both pondered it, and both of us reached the same conclusion as to how best to avoid the incessant watchfulness of the ubiquitous Indian spies.

"Hancock!"

It was Grim who voiced the suggestion uppermost in both our minds. Will Hancock is a reverend, possessed of weird ideas of heaven and hell and an entirely hospitable nature. He wears blue spectacles and runs a mission away across the Runjeet River, thirty miles beyond Darjiling, breeding sturdy little ponies on the side, and writing commentaries on the Buddhist scriptures in his spare time. He has proved, to his own satisfaction, that all the Pali manuscripts are forgeries; that the original Garden of Eden was in Ceylon; that the Afghans and Afridis are the ten lost tribes of Israel; that Alexander never crossed the Indus; and that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. He is a mild man in all except argument, an honest man in everything except debate, a genial, good-natured fellow until you mention any of the subjects and side issues he has made his own. Behind his graying brown

beard and heavily smoked glasses there is so obviously nothing except benevolence and bookish brains that not even the Intelligence Department keeps an eye on him.

"We can make it by sunset," said I.

But we did not. It was nearly midnight when we rode up to the mission and awoke Will Hancock from a just man's sleep by making a noise like a cat-and-dog fight, which he came out in pajamas to prevent. It took him about five minutes to unlock the iron gate under the archway, which would keep out almost anything except artillery (whereas the wall is hardly high enough to keep the knee-high convert-children in); but we rode in at last and were welcome, though we kept him out of bed beside a fragrant log fire in the mission dining-room until the dawn dyed Kanchenjunga's summit gold and crimson and the brass bell summoned him to prayer.

Will Hancock, who is much too shrewd not to have suspected us of mischief, sent his ponies to the hotel for our luggage and a messenger to bring Chullunder Ghose, thus throwing all suspicion off the scent, since nobody would dream of connecting Will with any intrigue more desperate than an assault on Shakespeare under the banner of Francis Bacon, sometime Earl of Verulam.

We rewarded him by praising his clean mission workshops, where an otherwise fortunate folk were being taught to shoulder Adam's curse and to acquire expensive tastes for unsuitable objects. We submitted to hearing uncomfortably clean, uncomprehending children sing the Ten Commandments; and in the afternoon Grim played the chapel organ, rendering *Nobody Knows How Dry I am* and *Alexander's Ragtime Band* so wonderfully that Will Hancock thought they were from Handel. (He is no authority on music.)

And in the evening came Chullunder Ghose, a sturdy-legged pony panting under him, three or four chins all grinning, a new heliotrope turban impudently poised on his enormous head, and a fat, sleek, pompous, half-ingratiating, half-truculent swagger, announcing the fact that he was glad to see us—not a doubt of that.

"Rammy sahib! *And* Jimgrim sahib! I am jolly well reborn! This babu might be father of twins, so proud I am at this summons, which is, doubtless, prelude to an offer of emolument! Oh yes, believe me, both yours very truly! Only name job and be done with it!"

Ungraciously, because we knew him and proposed to establish sound relationships at once, we tipped him off the pony and drove rather than led him into Hancock's study, where the treatises on Francis Bacon and Mosaic miracles

were heaped on chairs as well as on the desk and shelves. There was nowhere to sit except on the floor, so we arranged ourselves cross-legged in a triangle with the babu's face toward the lamp so that we might read his artfully concealed emotions. Then I held out my hand.

"Give me Rait's letter!" I said abruptly.

He shook hands, making believe he had not understood me.

"Rammy sahib, this is like old times," he said, heaving an enormous sigh. "How *tempus* does jolly well *fugit*. Is your honor prosperous?"

He looked much too prosperous. He had been robbing some Americans, as all Darjiling knew, and had not yet had time to lose the money by trying to treble or quadruple it.

"Rait's letter!" I repeated.

He affected not to hear and began complimenting Jimgrim on his personal appearance:

"Like money in pocket to see you, sahib! Like sunrise on perpetual snow-peaks! This babu basks in your honor's beatific presence!"

"Rait's letter!" I said a third time, spanking a fist into my hand for emphasis.

"Sahib, I heard you first shot out of barrel. Silence means dissent—not knowing, can't say—who is Rait? What letter? And besides, I brought no documents. How should I know why you sent for me?"

"Have you read the letter?" Grim asked. "If so, tell us what was in it; bring the letter afterward."

Chullunder Ghose rocked to and fro and scratched his stomach through the opening of an imported mauve and white-striped flannel shirt.

"Am all ears," he suggested. "Suitable proposition might act on memory like water from a can on radish seeds. No knowing. Might do worse than try it."

"You want a blind promise? What do you take us for?" asked Grim.

"Verity in all her nudity is priceless," said Chullunder Ghose. "Nevertheless, am scoundrel personally and would sell same. Sealed bids will be answered very promptly."

"I'll bid you a broken neck," I told him.

"You should take that bid to the police for registration," he retorted. "This babu is incorruptible by anything but bribes. Am honest scoundrel, not contemptible skin-salvationist."

"How many people beside yourself have read the letter?" Grim asked.

"Sahib, you have set accurate foot on cockroach of domes-

tic infelicity. This babu's wife of bosom is new-fangled female who believes in ruling roost. Being virtuous mother of seven children, same being now grown up but *not* self-supporting—as this babu can testify on stacks of holy books of all religions—she is peevishly disposed toward secretiveness and keen on cash. Having been promised money by insidious stranger and believing, as your honors seem to do, that your humble servant had received mysterious letter from unknown correspondent, she proceeded to search all this babu's garments—drawing blank as certainly as if she had bought ticket in Calcutta Sweep."

For a while he chuckled silently, shaking his great stomach, until we grew impatient. Then:

"By and by this babu was observed to bury tin biscuit-box by moonlight, under heap of manure in which she-cobra was reported to have laid eggs. Report was false, since cobras are non est in neighborhood but same made no diffierence to female nerves. Mongooses were bought, which slew chickens of neighbors. Wandering snake-charmers were consulted, and discovered cobras naturally, having brought same with them. Subsequently, coolies hired to rake manure heap brought forth empty biscuit-tin and were accused of having stolen all its contents. Heated acrimony, I assure you—followed by such meditation—you could hear my wife's brain clicking like imported Swiss alarm-clock.

"Virtuous mother of children had to maintain innocence and yet ease strain of her increasing curiosity and appetite for money. Same is complicated process. Much housecleaning, in order to look under carpets; likewise most ill-tasting victuals, containing adulterants purchased from unlicensed bazaar bootlegger of confounded drugs intended to make me talk in sleep. Resultant bellyache, however, totally prevented sleep, and this babu's haphazard remarks were beside the point altogether.

"Diet was changed, and tasted much worse. Self-preservation being first rule of all sensible religions, this babu, obeying number one rule, pretended sleep and talked much, suggesting many hiding-places—in all of which nobody home! My wife is good objectionist—first-class, but lacking enchantment which distance might add! Ring bell—they're off! Devil take hindermost! Where do we go from here?"

Grim signaled with his eyes. I seized the babu by the arms and jerked him off his balance. Grim stuck a hand into his waist-cloth, laughed, and showed Rait's letter in the lamplight. I let go, and the babu sat up, trying to look dignified as he rearranged his turban.

"You fat scoundrel!" I said. "That is my letter, addressed to me. What do you mean by not handing it over?"

"Fat belly and fat head are not same thing!" the babu answered. "I am honest scoundrel, which is whole point."

"The seal has been broken and replaced," said Grim.

"Contents of said letter being consequently known to this babu!" remarked Chullunder Ghose and once more scratched his stomach. "Am your honors' most obedient humble servant —in predicament from which I beseech rescue for the sake of former services. Tibetan spies who offered money to my wife for information as to contents of that letter are no more eager than British authorities who did ditto."

"Do you want to be bribed to hold your tongue?" Grim asked him.

Chullunder Ghose looked shocked—grieved—half-incredulous.

"Jimgrim sahib, I am scoundrel from necessity, but honest always. Being short of money, through inability to pull purse-strings of tight-wad wife—to whom I gave all my money for safe-keeping, easy-going disposition and experience of up-and-downishness of fortune being damn bad mixture—I, nevertheless, scorned offers of Tibetan spies, who would have bought that letter from me, cash down—and being refused would undoubtedly have killed me for it, had they been sure that they knew where to find it."

"Then what do you want?" demanded Grim.

"Salary plus expenses!"

"To do what?"

"Whither thou goest, I go, same as Ruth and Boaz in English History!"

"You're a lot too fat," said Grim.

"Not so. This is all guts," said the babu, smacking his enormous thighs. Then suddenly he changed his tone of voice and began pleading, swaying backward and forward, hurling the words at us. "Sahibs! I have read that letter! You will go to Tibet. You will not be able to resist! Have I more character than you? Can I resist? I have brains—imagination—courage; I have tasted all adversities; I have encountered dangers: I am failed B. A. Calcutta University, who might have been topnotcher barrister, with only ten more marks! I am adventurer by instinct, same as you, and shall a dark skin stop me? Formerly I have shared your risks; I have been loyal to you; I have kept your secrets; I have never cheated you—not even from the petty cash box when you had your office in the Chandni Chowk in Delhi and a child could have robbed you without your knowing it. I have

never refused to obey an order. I have spied and run errands and lied for you. I have made your honor and your success mine—more than mine, for I have set them ahead of mine! And all my life—I tell you, all my life!—I have longed, I have craved to go to Tibet! Shall I let this opportunity escape me? Not so! Do you make me threaten you? Then that is your fault. You are not fools: you are strong white sahibs, who know as well as I do that the color of a man's skin is no criterion. There are white cowards and brown brave men—brown cowards and white brave men. You know that, and you have tested me a hundred times. So—scoundrel that I am—I offer you my services, to go to Tibet. Should you say yes, then I shall serve you to the death. But should you say no, then I, also, shall say no. You shall not go to Tibet without me, for I will tell the contents of that letter to the Tibetan spies and to the British authorities, both!"

He paused, out of breath, with his hands on his knees, his jaws, that were black with the close-shaven hair, shining with sweat in the lamplight.

"He has more guts than I thought," said Grim. "How many people besides yourself have read the letter, babu-ji?"

"None! On my honor!"

"Were you followed to this place?"

"Maybe. I don't know. We shall soon discover," said Chullunder Ghose, a trifle sulkily.

Grim signaled with his eyes again. I nodded.

"We shall have to call your bluff," said Grim. "Without reading the letter, or deciding anything else, we refuse to be blackmailed. You may go and tell your tale to the authorities and get your money for it."

Chullunder Ghose looked downcast. He lowered his head for a moment so that we saw nothing but his turban.

"Too bad," he said, looking up again. "Oh, very well, I am scoundrel. I can also be magnanimous. I love you both and you may go to Tibet. I shall not tell. But I am sorry. I am heart-broken babu."

"We shall pay you, of course, for your silence," said Grim.

"Sahib, I refuse to take your money! Permission to you to go to Tibet is my free gift. You shall not deny me that one consolation."

Grim caught my eye again, and again I nodded.

"No," he said, "we won't deny you anything in reason. If we go to Tibet, you shall come with us."

Chullunder Ghose grinned. He did his best to look surprised, but he entirely failed. The rascal had merely shot us with the other barrel of his gun. He had been shrewd enough

to realize that Grim was only testing him by offering to call his bluff. He won the trick; and neither he nor we have since regretted that he did.

Three men set forth seeking fortune. And the one found gold; another came on good land, and he tilled it. But the third saw sunlight making jewels of the dew. All three went by the same road. Each one thought himself the richer.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER TWO

"A MANUSCRIPT IN THE HANDWRITING OF JESUS!"

ELMER RAIT'S letter had been wrapped in dogskin and then enclosed in a tough brown envelope. It smelled vaguely of ghee. The white paper was filthy with fingermarks, torn here and there, and turned yellow in places with age, as if Rait had made use of such stuff as he found in the markets of Lhassa.

"Dear Jeff: What on earth did we quarrel about? I forget. Nothing serious anyhow—probably ethics. You're a muscular moralist, whereas I'm practical and don't even want to make things better than they are. And here I am in Lhassa—the Forbidden City!—thinking of you, wishing you were here too, in spite of those winkers you wear, which you think are respectable compunctions, for all the world like an old maid in a bathing costume with the pants tied round her ankles. You ought to have been a bishop. You'd look splendid with a miter and crook. And how that fist of yours would shake a pulpit! However, there is nobody quite like you: nobody quite so whole-souled in stupidity with so much force behind it; nobody quite so willing to oblige a friend, and especially when the friend least deserves it; nobody more dependable. You're like a phalanx in reserve, or a siege-train—anything heavy and honest, that can hit like Billy-o when pointed in the right direction.

"Which is Tibet in this instance. Come along. I dare say money wouldn't tempt you, even though your ancestors were Scotch and you've a fortune salted down in tax-exemptums. I have spent seven years preparing for this trip, and I have got through this far as a Tibetan trader with a Chinese accent. I am after loot, though not the kind of loot that you'll appreciate—ancient manuscripts—priceless. Those won't tempt you either. This will.

"I am headed for Sham-bha-la. The place is said to be

fictitious, although three or four explorers have been within thirty or forty miles of it. You've heard of it, of course; you and I talked about it years ago; that time we met the Lama in Benares, who was paying his way with stamped gold ingots.

"When I started out for Lhassa I was not yet sure that Sham-bha-la is a real place, but now I'm positive. I'm almost sure I can get there, and get in, but almost equally sure I can't get out again without help. Hence this S. O. S. call for the phalanx.

"I will split with you fifty-fifty. It is true about the ancient libraries; the books are written on palm-leaves, treated with mastic such as the old Egyptians used, that has preserved them perfectly. They're bound with leather thongs between wooden blocks, which have had to be renewed every few centuries.

"The people who live in Sham-bha-la can read those books, which are in a language much older than Sanskrit. They are not a warlike people; they will not take life; they protect themselves from intrusion and interference by taking advantage of Tibetan superstition and dislike of strangers. The Dali Lama, who is a well-meaning man, and the Tashi Lama, who is an extremely intelligent religionist, do what they are told by these Sham-bha-la people, who advise them secretly.

"It would take too long to tell you how I found out all about them, but remember: although we quarreled about morals or some such nonsense, I never once gave you a wrong steer during all the years we were in partnership. If you find my trail and come to Sham-bha-la, I promise you full pay for all your trouble—gold, priceless manuscripts and information that will make historians and scientists look sick. Think of the fun of refuting the highbrows!

"Your danger will be mainly from Tibetans, who are dead-set on keeping all foreigners out of the country. I have quite convinced them I was born in Tibet and kidnaped over the Chinese border in my youth, but there's a rumor that a white man has slipped in through Gyang-tse (which is the way I came) so they'll be keeping an extra sharp lookout along that route. They strip all suspected wayfarers and search them, which is no joke with the wind at twenty below zero; so stain your skin with something permanent.

"It's an awful journey, which will suit you to a T. The country is hell, and you'll like it. There's no food fit to eat, no sugar, and you mayn't smoke. The wind gives you toothache, and Tibetans never wash; dirt helps to keep them warm and fuel is scarce everywhere. Tibetans are all right—

no bigger rogues than you and me—but awfully suspicious. Yes, I know well you believe you are honest. The Tibetans won't believe it, so look out for them.

"Beware of women, who are in a minority in Tibet and therefore doubly dangerous. Some of them go in for polyandry, and they like men herculean, so beware! They get indignant when their overtures are turned down, and the other husbands take it as an insult to themselves, so they go after you with bows and arrows. One white man I heard of—I forget his name—fell for the proposition, hoping to find some way to visit Lhassa; he found himself one of nine and, being the latest recruit—a mere Plebe, as it were—was made bell-hop to the gang. I'm told he stuck it out for five or six years, always trying to escape, until he almost forgot he was white; but one day he took a bath in a hot spring, the dye gave out, and the woman was tired of him anyway. So they had him examined by a government official, who found him guilty, had him flogged to death and fed him to the dogs. The fact that the woman and all her husbands were also flogged to death was not much consolation to him. Better avoid matrimony, even at the risk of seeming rude.

"Don't trust anyone on British territory, except Chullunder Ghose, who is an impudent scoundrel but extremely fond of you. Him you will have to trust, so make the best of it. You had better bring him with you; he will die in the passes, which is the best thing that could happen to him. You will probably need one confidant who can make the grade, but whatever you do, don't bring along a white man. Choose someone you can kick, and who won't matter much if he dies. Any white man would be certain to turn quarrelsome, at this elevation, with the bad grub, and dirt, and one thing and another. Particularly, don't bring Jimgrim or Narayan Singh. I know they're your friends, or you think they are, but I hate them both. They think they know too much, and neither of them has the slightest use for me.

"You must make your way toward Lhassa and work that great lump of a head of yours for all it's worth. Discover my Tibetan name and where I am. Naturally, I don't dare to write my Tibetan name in this letter, which might fall into the wrong hands, in spite of all precautions. You will have to prospect for me. You remember those marks we used to make on rocks when we were prospecting? Look out for those or something like them. Wherever you see such a mark beside the main road you may look for a message in writing not far from it—probably hidden under the stones of one of the countless roadside cairns on which each passer-by sticks a prayer-flag.

"You can't get in through China, because the Chinese and Tibetans haven't made peace, except nominally, and both sides have blocked the frontier. They say it's equally impossible to get down through Siberia, because the Soviet people have closed all routes, which are said to be almost impassable anyhow. Sven Hedin came up several years ago along the Valley of the Indus, while the Maharajah of Kashmir pretended to look the other way; there was an awful row about it, and the odds are that way's blocked; the Maharajah won't dare look away another time. You'd better take the least used and most difficult route you can find, and hold your tongue about it.

"The chief danger, of course, is from spies on the Indian side of the border, who might learn of your intentions and tip off the Lhassa Government. There's a telegraph wire between Lhassa and Gyang-tse, at which latter place there's a British officer and a small detachment of troops who help the Tibetans to watch the border. It's the funniest amateur telegraph set you ever saw, but it serves its purpose, which is to help them keep out foreigners.

"Kashmiris and Bhutanis are allowed to travel in Tibet without much interference. Let your beard grow, curl it, and you'll look enough like a Kashmiri merchant to get by, provided you don't talk too much. Don't kid yourself that you can speak Kashmiri like a native. You never could. You can't. You never will. You can look the part, and you're a better actor than your idiotic modesty allows you to pretend. So pretend to be sick—or be deaf and dumb—or mad. Affliction is a passport everywhere. You always were mad anyhow; you ought to find that rôle easy.

"Either I am on the track of the most important discovery of modern times, or else I shall explode a fable that a third of the world has believed so long that it has become a tenet of religion. After seven years' preparation and inquiry I am confident that this is not a mare's nest, however, and that the results will exceed expectations. The main trouble will be to get out with the loot, which is why it's so important you should come.

"My argument is this: These men in Sham-bha-la possess important secrets, and they are clever enough to have kept themselves hidden—almost, you might say, a myth—for centuries, although in ancient times there used to be a traveled highway to their door, all the way across Asia from Europe. Why they withdrew into their shell, I don't know. It is said Pythagoras went to them; and so did Lao-Tse. They hide themselves, and they protect themselves behind the screen of

the Tibetans' savagery, but they *won't take life*. So, if we can penetrate the screen, we're safe.

"Do you remember the story about that woman who once overheard the secrets of Freemasonry? They couldn't kill her. They couldn't turn her loose with their secrets. They had to admit her into the Order. Why she didn't take advantage of them to start a lodge for women and make herself Grand-Mistress of it, is beyond me to imagine. Some weird point of morals probably, which certainly would never limit me.

"From what I have heard and definitely ascertained and guessed—one thing added to another—I believe that I can get through and oblige these Sham-bha-la people to admit me into their secrets. If they can find some way of binding me, that will mean no more to me than a wisp of straw; good luck to them! I'll give them best if they can prove it; but they will have to prove something more than that they can make me take an oath on an ancient book. To get there, to meet them and to force their hand is up to me. To make me keep their secrets after that, is up to them. They'll have to use their wits if they propose to pack me off without an armful of their ancient books—if nothing else. And get this: I am told there is a manuscript in the handwriting of Jesus!

"So now you know enough to start you rolling blankets! Bring no tobacco with you, but as much sugar as you can hide among your loads: there isn't any sugar in all Tibet, and you'll crave it like a hop-head yelling for his coke.

"If you should get any hint of my whereabouts before you reach Lhassa, leave Lhassa out of your itinerary. The monks here are fanatical, suspicious, quarrelsome and rather wide-awake. Be careful at the wayside inns, where there are always spies, who get paid by results and are therefore keen on the job.

"Wear snow spectacles, and don't wash. A clean man, who has no lice on him, is certain to arouse suspicion. There—think that's all. I'm going to count on you to come, and shall make all my plans accordingly. You will suit yourself, of course. But if you don't come you will have it on your conscience that you left me in the lurch after my running the prodigious risk of writing you this letter, which might easily betray me if the wrong man should get hold of it. Just for once in your life don't moralize—don't preach to yourself—don't get all bogged up in a sticky code of out-of-fashion ethics, but remember I was once your partner, and come just as fast as your obstinate old legs can bring you.

"Yours, E.R."

I read the letter aloud to Grim.

"I hope they've fed him to the dogs," he commented. "He's rotten!"

"Nevertheless," remarked Chullunder Ghose, "he is absolutely right about Narayan Singh, who should not come with us. That Sikh slew the Dead Sea! This babu is pretty good insurance risk without Narayan Singh to get us into trouble by sticking his sword into all comers. Am pacifist for totally immoral reasons, same being it is safer. Smack me and I smack you. Smile, and the world regards you as pigeon whom it can pluck much less aggressively. Let us therefore not be aggresseés but leave Narayan Singh behind."

"He's in the railway police now," Grim remarked. "Generally on duty at one of the Delhi stations, watching passengers off the express trains."

"How democratic! Am already out-voted!" said Chullunder Ghose. "That Sikh will increase majority to three to one. Am personally G. B. Shavian opinionist, believing that majorities are always wrong—but never mind, I would rather be wrong than have to live in a barrel like Diogenes. It is also better to pay income taxes than to be a hermit. Let us make plans."

My son, some kings are commonplace, and not all laborers are worthy of their hire. But this I say to you: that if you are in league with gods to learn life and to live it, neither kings nor commoners can possibly prevent you, though they try their utmost. You shall find help unexpectedly, from strangers who, it may be, know not why.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER THREE

IN WHICH BENJAMIN YIELDS AS A WOMAN SHOULD, FOR LOVE, NOT MONEY

IT WAS not long before we learned that we had failed to throw spies off the scent. That night we sat up late discussing Tibet with Will Hancock, who had a surprising amount of information about the country. We did not admit to him that we intended to make our way over the border, he being one of those conscientious men who would have felt obliged to inform the government of anything he actually knew. But he is no man's fool; he answered all our questions without committing any such indiscretion as to ask us questions in return.

Will Hancock's chief anxiety was the season of the year. It was already autumn: the monsoon was likely to break at almost any time, after which the valleys and all the lower slopes of the Himalayas would be deluged, and the upper passes would be blocked with snow. However, he had other reasons for instilling caution:

"Some people enjoy disobeying governments," he said, blinking at us through his horn-rimmed spectacles. "But up in Tibet they have made a cult of disobedience to God! It is a lie that there is any pure philosophy or pure religion up there. What there is, is sorcery—black magic—the same evil that the witch of Endor practised and that brought Sodom and Gomorrah to their ruin—that alliance with the powers of evil that the Apostle Paul denounced. With all my heart I would advise anyone against trespassing in Tibet."

"You should publish a book on the subject," said Grim.

"What—and advertise iniquity?"

Will Hancock lectured us for hours on the sin of curiosity, but at the end of it I think he realized he had only contrived to arouse that vice in us.

Next morning there was a great bell-ringing at the outer

gate and a man named Tsang-Mondrong, a Tibetan, asked to see the "white sahibs."

"Was fifty-fifty spy of both sides on Younghusband expedition!" said Chullunder Ghose. But Grim, who was on that expedition too, did not remember him.

He turned out to be one of those products of the meeting of the East and West who can speak English with extraordinary fluency, and who think they understand the Western point of view so well as to be able to impose their espionage unsuspected. He had been keeping watch on Chullunder Ghose and had simply followed him out to the mission.

He pretended to think that Grim and I were planning an expedition after big game, asked whether we had permits, and offered his services as guide, saying he knew some good bear country and some trails leading northward that were hardly ever used and consequently teeming with big game of all kinds. It was a ridiculously obvious trap to get us to reveal our plans to him. He sat there, itching to be questioned.

So we told him we were leaving for Bombay and Europe; and to convince him I asked him to take a telegram back to Darjiling for despatch to Bombay, ordering reservations on the earliest available steamer, but wording the telegram in such a way that the steamer people would not accept it as a definite order. He agreed to take the telegram but hung around all morning questioning the mission servants and even trying to get Hancock to reveal our confidences.

He was one of the ugliest men I have ever seen, and the more we saw of him, the more hideous he seemed to become. In the first place he was pock-marked, and the pits were so deep and wide that they resembled the craters on the moon seen through a high-powered telescope. He had the usual Mongolian high cheek-bones and more or less almond eyes, but his eyes were yellow, not brown, with a tinge of green in them, and as he had neither eyelashes nor eyebrows, the effect was gruesome. Where eyebrows should have been there was a scar that looked as if it might have been made by a whip thong. The teeth of his lower jaw projected and when he grinned, which he did almost whenever he spoke, his lower lip drew downward and displayed the gum. His skin was the color of raw pig's liver. His neck was so short that his head seemed to grow from his shoulders, which were extremely wide. He had unusually long arms, a long body, and legs much too short for his height; the sleeves of his bazaar-made khaki jacket hardly came below his elbows, whereas his trousers had to be rolled up several inches. One foot was considerably larger than the other.

Yet, in spite of those deformities, he was as active as a cat, and though his head was narrow and stupid looking—though, in fact, he actually was stupid in many respects almost to the verge of idiocy—he was very sharp-witted and far-sighted, as well as persistent along lines where he thought his own particular personal interests were concerned.

"He will be harder to get rid of than a louse without disinfectant," said Chullunder Ghose. "He will take that telegram and show it to the authorities, to prove to them that we do not need to be watched, by that means securing a monopoly of watching us. Thus, when the time comes to betray us he will not need to share the reward; and he will certainly first blackmail us out of our senses before handing over what is left to us for the authorities to jump on. Argue with me! Subdue me with violence! Make rude remarks about my mother! Prove to me, black on white, that I am wrong! Nevertheless, I know and I have told you."

Chullunder Ghose was right, and we believed him, but we had a plan that we thought would hide our objective and make it appear mere waste of time to shadow us. The trails leading into Tibet by way of Sikkim and Bhutan are more numerous than many people think, and some of them are not so difficult as rumor makes them out to be. Armies, for instance, have marched over those passes in midwinter, and there is hardly any season of the year when Tibetans are unable to reach India if they wish. But all the well-known routes were certain to be watched, especially since it was known to the Tibetans, as well as the British Government, that Rait had crossed the border; and though we did not actually know of any other route than those marked on the maps, we had more reasons than one for going first of all to Delhi.

In Delhi was our friend Narayan Singh, whom we proposed to take with us. And in Delhi was a Jew named Benjamin, who certainly has never been in Tibet, but whose network of business connections is like a ganglion of nerves that ramify through Asia.

So to Delhi we made our way by train from Darjiling, attracting as little attention to ourselves as possible and marking "Bombay" on our luggage labels. Darjiling is the mountain terminus of a two-foot gauge line that runs through some of the finest scenery in the world to Siliguri, which is the main-line junction. On Darjiling station was the usual crowd of Lepchas, Nepalis, Eurasians, Sikkimese, Bengalis, nondescripts, and a scattering of Europeans, and there were certainly police spies in the crowd, some of whom studied our luggage labels. Three men and a woman were within

earshot when we bought the tickets, and one half-naked individual appeared to be watching Chullunder Ghose to see whether or not he was in attendance on us. But there was no sign of Tsang-Mondrong until the whistle blew for the train to start. Then, leaning out of a window, I saw him run out of the waiting-room and jump into a third-class carriage.

At Siliguri he concealed himself behind a mound of luggage; but I saw him leave his lurking place to buy a ticket and when the main-line train came in he boarded it. Thereafter, at every station at which the express stopped on the way to Delhi he was out on the platform watching for us.

Chullunder Ghose came into our compartment and regaled us with gloomy reminiscences. He appeared already to have lost all confidence in the success of our adventure.

"Tsang-Mondrong," he said, "is identical swine who gave lessons in Tibetan to Rait sahib, continuing same for six months until discovered tearing secret notes out of a memorandum book. Rait sahib being little man, resultant fight was jolly well worth one rupee admission. This babu witnessed that imbroglio and afterward assisted to recorrect alignment of Tibetan's limbs, Rait sahib having ju-jutsued hind leg into place where teeth should be and vice versa. Reconstruction was like Chinese puzzle with directions how to open it inside. Tsang-Mondrong probably is contemplating vengeance, hoping to trace Rait sahib by following us. You may think you know a lot, but you have no idea how these savages pursue a vengeance to the limit. Wait and see!"

However, there is such a thing as luck, although it usually comes with a sting in its tail, and having made you overconfident, presents you with a crisis and deserts you when you least expect it. On the Delhi station platform was Narayan Singh in khaki uniform with a row of medal ribbons on his breast. His black beard parted in a flashing smile the moment he saw us, and he came running, waving his arm commandingly for porters, in two minds whether to salute or to throw convention to the winds and shake us by the hand.

"Sahibs!" he exclaimed. "Sahibs!" He seemed more glad to see us than if we had been brothers risen from the grave. "What now? This police work is no trade for a man like me!"

Grim took him by the elbow and pointed out Tsang-Mondrong, who was making his way through the crowd toward the exit where he would be able to keep an eye on us.

"Arrest him!" said Grim. "Keep him under lock and key until we've given him the slip. Then chuck your job and come to us at Benjamin's."

He grinned. A minute later the Tibetan made the grave mistake of offering resistance to arrest and, furthermore, misjudged Narayan Singh's strength, which is not much less than mine. Three policemen came up on the run with their yellow truncheons swinging, and Tsang-Mondrong had not even enough senses left to be meek with by the time the handcuffs had been snapped on. He was hurled into the station lock-up and there held *incommunicado* for the ambulance.

Grim and I took one cab, Chullunder Ghose another, and we drove by different routes through the swarming, stinking streets to Benjamin's in the Chandni Chowk, which is the old Street of the Silversmiths, the heart of the business zone of modern Delhi. The old Jew's shop draws no attention to itself, its narrow, shabby-looking front being wedged between two warehouses, but that appearance is deceptive; the narrow front part where the counter is, with a row of shelves behind it, leads to a curtain at the rear beside a stairway, and beyond that is a vast and shadowy warehouse where the odds and ends of all the world, from London to Pekin, are piled in heaps amid a smell of saddlery, dried camel sweat, old clothes and spices.

The old Jew received us warily, his red-rimmed eyes betraying nervousness, artistic-looking fingers scratching his chin through a long beard streaked with gray.

"Jimgrim!" he said. "Ramsden! Tscha-tscha! Vultures! Kites! When you gather, there is trouble. What now?"

We sat down on a pile of carpets in the gloom and lighted cigarettes before we answered, he peering at us, slightly stooped, kneading his fingers together—a typical Asian Jew, if there is such a thing, more nervous than a bird and full of wisdom won in combat with the world's unfairness—timid where a Gentile would be rash, bold where a Gentile would not dare to venture—generous, thrifty, honest, a keen bargainer contemptuous of fools—a man of strong affections and extreme fears.

"Confidences, Benjamin," I said, when I had smoked about a quarter of a cigarette and Grim continued silent.

"Nah-nah! Keep your confidences! Those are dangerous!" He scratched his head, pushing his embroidered silk turban forward over his forehead.

"When did you begin to play safe?" Grim inquired.

"Nobody brings confidences here unless he wants money or——"

"Give him our money," said Grim, and I began to count out Bank-of-England notes.

"Trouble!" said Benjamin. "I smell trouble! Take your money to the bankers!"

"The clerks who keep bank ledgers sell their information. You know that as well as I do, Benjamin," said Grim. "Give us a receipt, and tell us how to get to Tibet."

He flew into a passion of denials, swearing he knew nothing about Tibet, never had been there, knew nobody who had been, had had nothing to do with the country at any time, and did not intend to have anything to do with it.

"And I am old," he added. "I know best."

"It is because you are old, and you know, and we know you, that we have come to you," said Grim.

"But it is against the law! There is an order in council——"

"Benjamin," said Grim, "who thought about orders in council, or law, when your relatives were starving in a Turkish prison and Jeff Ramsden helped them out? Did *you* study law when you hid Rabindra Das after the Amritsar business and helped him escape into Persia?"

"Who told you that?" Benjamin demanded.

"Rabindra Das. I also helped him to escape," said Grim.

"Yei-yei-yei—who shall keep secrets while you live, Jimgrim? How many of you go to Tibet?"

"Jeff and I, Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose."

"Tshuh! You talk madness! You—yes—maybe. Ramsden? Better take an elephant! Chullunder Ghose? Narayan Singh? The one will talk to all comers and try to sell lottery tickets to the Tashi Lama; the other will offer to fight the whole Tibetan army!"

Nevertheless, Benjamin took up the money from the mat and went to a desk in the corner to write a receipt. It was while he was doing that, that Chullunder Ghose came in, as genial and confident as if he owned the store, with none of its responsibilities.

"Salaam, Benjamin! Salaam, O chosen person! Son of the great Joshua who made the sun stand still, salaam! We wish for chariot of Elijah in which to cross Himalayan Mountains; order same for us, taking care that taximeter has been properly inspected—submarine of Jonah being useless in this instance! Nevertheless, be careful of police, who will look up chariot's license number!"

Benjamin eyed him sourly; there had never been love lost between them—as there never is when one man laughs at life and at himself, while the other takes all things seriously. Benjamin, who probably has suffered less from disappointment than Chullunder Ghose, and who at any rate has grown rich, resents the suggestion that life is a comedy, whereas the

babu, who was ever a spendthrift, mocks death itself, since he believes that death is nothing but the end of an illusion.

"That fool will ruin you," said Benjamin, inviting a retort that might lead to an excuse to wash his hands of us. But the babu sat still, like a contemplative idol, only opening one eye a trifle wider as Narayan Singh strode in.

The Sikh was no longer in uniform, but he stood before us with arms folded on his breast and a soldier's attitude toward life's problems stamped all over him.

"The Tibetan Tsang-Mondrong will undoubtedly receive a month's hard labor for resisting three policemen," he announced. "They three, not I, have charged him, being young men seeking credit—thus releasing me from having to give evidence. Tsang-Mondrong is unknown in Delhi, so can call no witnesses. What next do we undertake?"

"Tibet," I said; and he grinned.

It is impossible to write of him without emotion. Even in this draughty cave, with a ninety-mile wind howling across barren wastes outside, I grow warm at the thought of him; and I can write of him with less restraint, since he is dead—having died as calmly as he lived, thrusting himself into danger for the sake of others.

He was a soldier first and last, with all of a Sikh soldier's ruthlessness when it came to action, but a patience beyond praise until the moment came when patience would no longer be a virtue. He regarded this life, in so far as I could ever dig down through the silences to his philosophy, as something like an armed camp, in which all the hosts of evil are arrayed against each individual's manhood. When he killed (and he must have slain dozens) he did it with a strange impersonality that in no way handicapped his zeal or efficiency. He never boasted—had no pride in any ordinary meaning of the term—and undertook the meanest task without a moment's hesitation, being utterly above all caste restrictions. And he went off into the unknown with us with no more fuss or excitement than if he were about to cross the street.

He stalked through the world like a stranger to it, having no home ties I ever heard of, and no religious interests that he ever mentioned—a thing very unusual in a Sikh. I never saw him pray, nor heard him say a word against another man's religion, except good-naturedly, when Chullunder Ghose, or someone else teased him.

He was a friend—a grand ally—an uncomplaining messmate in extremity—and an enigma. I cannot explain him. If there is truth in what the Eastern sages teach, then one might guess that he was marking time between two lives, perhaps a great man in the last one and to be a great one in the next. I

don't pretend to know; I am only hazarding an explanation of him that, while not explaining, may suggest a mental picture of him.

It is easier to describe him as he stood there beside Benjamin the Jew and waited for us to issue marching orders —tall, statuesque, with dark-brown eyes that never seemed to sleep, immensely dignified without a trace of cheap conceit, his black beard curled and his mustache turned rather fiercely upward. Sabered or not, he always stood as if there were a saber at his waist. When not in action his arms were usually folded on his breast and his eyes appeared to search horizons—or infinity.

I gave him Rait's letter to read and he went to where a beam of sunlight shone through the open doorway, to sit down on a bale of merchandise and pore over the difficult handwriting, his lips moving as he construed it word by word into his own tongue.

"Outfit?" asked Benjamin and beckoned an assistant, pointing with a yardstick at the things we might require, which the assistant dragged down from the shelves and piled into a heap. But that was no more than an excuse for not talking to us; the old Jew kept muttering to himself, gesturing disgustedly, as if rejecting one thought, then another.

"Which way will you go? By way of Sikkim?" he asked suddenly.

Grim nudged me, and none of us answered. In the East it is invariably wiser to say nothing than to answer foolishly. A random answer, yes or no, shuts off negotiation.

"If you take my advice, you won't go at all," said Benjamin. "Winter! Winter before you can reach the passes! Do you know what that means?"

"It means no trouble with frontier guards," said Grim.

"Tschah! They will find your frozen bodies in the spring, and strip them!" Benjamin said, frowning.

He turned away from us, and Grim nudged me again. The old Jew's hands were moving as if he were tossing something—weighing it.

"Sure," said Grim, "we'll do your business for you!"

Benjamin faced about suddenly.

"What do you know?" he demanded. "You, Jimgrim, what do you know?"

He scowled at Chullunder Ghose and glanced once or twice at the Sikh, who was still studying the letter.

"One man is a risk. Four men are four times the risk! I tell you, Jimgrim—"

"Trust me, trust my friends," Grim interrupted.

Benjamin resumed his fossicking among the shelves, pulling

out cooking pots, knives, leather caps, yak-hair blankets, yak-skin overcoats, heaping them all on the floor until there seemed enough for a young army. Narayan Singh came striding to where we sat and handed me Rait's letter.

"Yes," he said, "I come with you. But Rait is no good."

"Sikh!" exclaimed Benjamin, and came and stood close to him. "What if I don't trust you? What if I refuse? What then?"

Narayan Singh laughed tolerantly.

"I have lived these many years without your aid," he answered. "Jew, do you own Tibet?"

Benjamin displayed two rows of yellow teeth with gaps between them—more a grimace than a grin.

"You Sikh! You think, if I refuse, you can make a trouble for me?"

Narayan Singh laughed again.

"Jew, you have trouble enough," he retorted. "Give help or withhold it. I will go to Tibet."

Benjamin nodded, relaxing exactly as if pain had left him.

"Where is Mordecai?" Chullunder Ghose asked suddenly. "Is Mordecai in Tibet?"

Benjamin stared at him, startled. Grim smiled: it was his question; he had prompted the babu in a whisper. Grim and I both knew Mordecai, although it was several years since we last saw him—in Damascus, whither he had brought the goods of the Bokhara Jews by caravan while the war was raging. Mordecai had married Benjamin's fat daughter (he being a man whom nothing terrified); he was a sort of Marco Polo among bargain-hunters, looking for his merchandise where most men thought none existed, and selling it in New York—London—Paris—Moscow—anywhere where profits could be made; a daring wanderer with a vocabulary made up from a dozen languages and a line of impudence that he himself invented.

Benjamin beckoned Grim and me into a small, dark inner room, where he lighted a lamp that had a broken chimney.

"Who will do a favor for an old Jew?" he asked, the lamp trembling in his hand. "It is 'Jew, do this for me! Jew, do that for me!' But if the Jew wants favors he must—"

"——say exactly what he does want," Grim suggested.

"Will you find Mordecai? Will you take a message to him? Nah-nah!"

"Why not? Tell us where he is," said Grim.

"God knows where he is!" said Benjamin. "He went to Tibet—but not by the route that you shall use—he traveled swiftly. Twenty years I have been known to the Tibetans, though I have never been to Lhassa. Mordecai has been three

times. I am purchasing agent. Also I supply them information—but the Indian Government does not know that. Why do you wish to go to Tibet?"

Grim said as much about Rait as could be told within the compass of a hundred words.

"Do you know Rait?" he asked.

"No," said Benjamin. "Mordecai knows him. Mordecai met him in Simla—met him again in Darjiling. Rait asked Mordecai so many questions that my son-in-law put two and two together. There are questions such as fools ask—questions such as men ask who will write books—questions such as men ask who will go, look, see for themselves—you understand me? He is a rogue of an explorer, is that fellow Mordecai; there are no mysteries too far away for him; like a hound he goes after them all, and he loves to be the first one to discover things. Said Mordecai, 'I know what Rait is after.' So, because he makes a good profit wherever he goes, I gave him a report from Moscow for the Dalai Lama. Those Soviet people have been thinking about Tibet; I had news about it from my cousin, who is a commissar as they call them; so I warned the Dalai Lama. But there is no news now from Mordecai since seven months. I am thinking Rait has killed him."

I laughed at that, believing I knew Rait.

"Butter," I said, "would melt in Rait's mouth, but he isn't a high-binder."

"Nah-nah! You don't know!" Benjamin retorted. "That Roof of the World makes men like animals! The search for sacred things makes devils of them! Did people flay and burn us Jews for the love of money? Nah-nah-nah! They did it for religion—for the things they thought are holy! There are older and holier books than the Quabalah up there in Tibet. And there are worse things than crime! There is madness there! What if Rait kills Mordecai? Will you four bring him back to life? What if the black evil gets him? You Jimgrim—you Ramsden—maybe you are all right, you two. You two may be proof against the evil. But the Sikh? The Bengali? Who shall know their hearts? I have my daughter, and her daughters—little ones—no male heir except Mordecai. He has been better than a first-born."

"Yet you let him go to Tibet?" Grim suggested.

Benjamin snapped his fingers, cracking all the knuckle-bones, and drew a long breath through his teeth.

"Can you tie up a Jew in a stable?" he asked. "Who was it went with Christopher Columbus? Jews! The sun stood still on Gideon and the moon in the valley of Avalon, but not the Jews—nah-nah! But a Jew can be caught by the evil—the

black evil! If I help you into Tibet, will you find my Mordecai and bring him back to me?"

The heat was stifling in that inner room. The lamp smoked as it trembled in the old Jew's hand, and we sweated in streams, but we had to use patience. Men like Benjamin know only too well, and too bitterly, what happens when the West joins hands with them: labor and risk fall to the Asian; the rewards go to the white man's country. Grim and I had proved to Benjamin a time or two that, though we might not have it in us to keep faith exactly as the East interprets it, we were men of our word and fair according to our lights. But he was nervous.

"If I show you a secret—a secret route into the heart of Tibet—how long will it be a secret after that?" he demanded. "You two—maybe I shall take a chance on you; but those two? Listen to me! Twenty long years I have kept the secret; and the English, they knew I know it—teasing, coaxing, threatening, spying on me, offering this and that—trade opportunities, contracts, anything I please if I will show that route to them. What was it to me, if I should lose the Lhassa business? Nothing! The English would have paid the profit back twice over. Why then? Why will a woman not yield to a man—though she love him—though he offer her a fortune? It is her honor, isn't it? They'll tell you Jews know nothing about honor. Eh-heh! They who have tried to buy my secret will say that to you! And if I tell you, am I better than a woman who has yielded?"

"Oh well, all four of us will probably get killed," said Grim.

"Tschah-h-h! Much good that would do me! Shall I ever look the lamas in the face again? But Mordecai"—he set the lamp down—"I have no other first-born. Will you bring me news of him?"

"Maybe."

"But will you look for him?"

"Judge that for yourself," Grim answered. "We could promise anything. As for your secret—if we *buy* it from you, we would have the right to sell it."

"Nothing for nothing!" Benjamin began.

"Rot!" said Grim. "You talk about a woman's virtue. Will you sell yours? We four—or whichever of us lives—will look for Mordecai and bring you word of him. Keep your virgin secret until you like someone well enough to sacrifice it! Let's get out of this hole; there's no air."

Benjamin stood with his left hand on the door-latch. Grim's face, filthy with the lamp smoke, smiled at him poker-wise; there was no reading it. I felt that we had lost

the trick, but I tried to disguise the feeling and searched for a last argument to change the old fellow's mind.

"Look here, Benjamin," I began; but he shook his head at me and held his hand up.

"Shuh-shuh-shuh-shuh—sheyh!" he interrupted. "Beat a dead horse, will you? Am I saying no? I shall give you a writing that will take you all the way to Tibet.——Jimgrim," he said, clutching him by the arm, "you are a wise one! You know the trick of how to win! You should have been a Jew, you, Jimgrim!"

Death pursues life. Is there anything without its opposite? Or any cause without its consequence? Or any light that casts no shadow?

So, I tell you that your very inmost thoughts awaken hosts that otherwise had slept, as sound awakens echoes. Therefore it is neither miracle nor mystery that there is no escape from spies nor any safety other than an upright zeal that makes haste, leaving the spies forever a march behind.

This is the so-called mystery of leadership.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SPIES OF THE DEVIL'S GUARD.

Some men yearn to become bishops; probably that yearning makes them put their utmost into life, which is the only way to extract one's share of satisfaction. I have met, and known, and liked men who could not resist the lure of a stage-door. One of my respected friends will cross the world to hunt for a rare butterfly in fever swamps. And I know a woman whose health, youth, popularity and family combined cannot prevent her from sailing the ocean alone in a thirty-foot sloop for weeks at a time when certain impulses, as unexplainable as life itself, assert their recurring spell. I don't believe it matters which enthusiasm we adopt, provided we have one and drive it, or let it drive us, for all it and we are worth.

The same lure that had beckoned Rait and Mordecai, had stirred whatever it is that differentiates us men from mushrooms, in Chullunder Ghose, Narayan Singh, Grim and me. Not one of us—not even Benjamin, who unlocked a secret door for us—even remotely guessed what lay ahead. We simply listened to an icy siren-song blown to us over the Roof of the World, and responded because there would have been no peace within us otherwise.

Out of that agglomeration of world combings that he calls his shop old Benjamin supplied equipment, even including an excellent compass, and maps copied (doubtless without permission) from the Survey Department files. Such few things as he did not have in stock he personally bought for us—forceps, for instance, for pulling teeth, a quantity of patent anesthetic, bandages, brandy, sugar, and beef extract; so that we did not need to be seen wandering about Delhi.

He sent a man far into Kashmir to buy ponies for us, with the result that we were supplied with the best, instead of incurring the usual fate of those who buy from strangers in a

hurry. Night after night, when the store was closed and his fat daughter had spread food for us on a carpet beneath an old temple lamp, he told us all he knew about Tibetans and their country. It was he who stained my skin so admirably that the color still endures, although I have been half-boiled in natural hot-springs and half-frozen in the Tsang-po River.

There was no need to darken Grim's tough hide; it had been sun-baked so that he was actually darker than Narayan Singh, although one did not realize it until he disguised himself in the native costume. Benjamin seemed to have no fear whatever on Grim's account, although he was in agonies of apprehension about the rest of us—Chullunder Ghose particularly, delaying us for three days after our equipment was all ready because he did not believe his instructions had sufficiently soaked in.

There was something that he feared more than any physical danger, and I think Grim knew what it was, although Benjamin would only hint at it, shuddering and throwing up his hands in pious horror. But in all other respects he was minutely definite.

He warned us against smoking, which is a crime in Tibet; never to pass on our left-hand side any religious monument or any individual entitled to respect; not to shoot wild game, and not to be seen eating chicken or drinking milk.

But above all, he advised me to be silent. Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose could get by as Kashmiri merchants, who are allowed in Tibet. Grim, if extremely careful, might even pass as a Tibetan. As for me, my accent being amateurish and vocabulary limited, speech with any stranger would be out of the question, once over the border.

"Be you deaf and dumb!" he insisted. "These are your friends, who are taking you to the Medical College on the Chakpo Hill outside Lhassa, hoping you may be cured by a miracle. Yeh-tschah-tschah! And a miracle it is, when *they* cure anybody! Anatomy they know—a little—since they cut up corpses; and they have nine poisons that are unknown to the European chemists, but they are the worst doctors in the world! Be you a doctor, Ramsden. Toothache is their commonest complaint. Pull teeth for nothing, and so win their gratitude—because the monks charge too much. If they are grateful they may not be so suspicious. But you mustn't talk—nah-nah—not one word—*niemals!* You have had a curse put on you by a Hindu hakim; the babu can tell that story, he being a very good one at inventing lies. The Tibetans know all about curses. They know too much about them! If you cure their toothaches they will not ask many questions. But, though you say you are going to Chakpo,

don't you let their doctors touch you! They are devils—bad, ignorant devils, yet they know altogether too much! If they suspect you they will simply poison your body! But better that than fall into the power of certain others! There are sons of evil up there!"

The road is free and open into Kashmir, which is a tourists' Mecca nowadays, with shops for the sale of imported souvenirs and a better system for fleecing Americans than even Deauville and the Riviera boast. We went by train to Rawalpindi—third class, trying out our new disguises—and I did so well that I was actually struck by an Eurasian conductor, who mistook my silence for fear of himself and his official buttons.

Because he overlooks no chance to turn a profit, and also, perhaps, to make our own peculiarly packed loads less conspicuous, Benjamin entrusted us with nearly two tons of merchandise consigned to his agents in Srinagar. So we hired an auto-truck in Rawalpindi, along with a driver and two helpers; but we had to wait three days for Benjamin's freight to overtake us, and a letter from Benjamin reached us by special messenger (not one of his own clerks, however) three or four hours before the freight train dawdled in.

The letter was alarming. We had left Tsiang-Mondrong, we imagined, snugly *incommunicado* in the jail, the expected thirty-day sentence having been promptly passed on him by the Mahommedan magistrate. Nevertheless, Benjamin wrote that a Tibetan had been hanging around the store and asking questions.

"As for me, I told him nothing, but he may have learned much from one of my assistants, who is a Klapperstorch. Nor do I dare to send one of my own men with this letter, lest the Tibetan should follow him. This messenger has been paid, but you will do well to pay him again, so that he may go away and get drunk and perhaps get himself into a trouble before he makes a greater one for you."

So we paid the man twice what the service was worth, and Grim took him off to a reeking hole where an Eurasian sold arrack, nor left him until he had drunk the best part of a bottle of the stuff and was in no fit state to tell an intelligible story, to Tibetans or anyone else. Meanwhile, Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose spread talk through the bazaar that might lead people to believe we were heading southward again. Then, hoping at any rate that we had thrown spies off the scent, we stacked our loads on to the truck and started for Murree and the Kashmir Pass.

We had a letter from Benjamin, containing hardly fifty words, in a language that only Grim could read, which the

old Jew guaranteed should open for us a route along which pursuit would be impossible; but before we could use that key we must put all of Kashmir behind us. Beyond the Kashmir Valley, between us and Ladakh where the secret route began, was the Zogi-la Pass, eleven thousand feet above sea-level. The road across the Zogi-la is open all winter long, except for a dozen miles or so, but those dozen miles might as well be fifty, once the winter storms begin; so our first task was to cross the Zogi-la before the snow fell, after which the sooner the nor'westers should blow the drifts deep into the narrow gorge and shut off all pursuit, the better.

It was the end of the summer season. Tourists and officials on vacation poured out through the pass, the stream of motor-cars and carts constantly delayed us, since there are only certain places where wheeled traffic can pass. Threading our way patiently against the hurrying flood of tourist-cars and luggage trucks, we might have excited curiosity if we had been dressed as Europeans, but as Kashmiri merchants we only drew down objurgations on our heads.

In spite of old Benjamin's mysterious hints, we felt like schoolboys on a picnic. There was exhilaration in the air—a certain winelike sharpness and a wind that bore the dust along in clouds, but not a hint yet of the Himalayan winter, although Narayan Singh swore once or twice that he could smell snow. We mocked his pessimism and enjoyed the scenery, behind a driver who scorned precipices.

I had not adopted the deaf and dumb rôle yet, but kept my head wrapped in a shawl, pretending to have toothache on both sides of my mouth, in order to avoid conversation with strangers. But by night, when we cooked our meal beside the truck preparatory to sleeping underneath it, we were at the mercy of benevolence. There is a freemasonry of sickness, and the native Indian is nothing if not inquisitive. Men camped near by came to sit beside us and compare notes, keeping Grim, Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose in turn busy answering questions about what ailed me, and I was offered remedies that ranged all the way from opium to powdered brick from a Moslem martyr's tomb.

However, we were not in actual danger of discovery until we bumped and swung down-hill toward the Kashmir Valley, where the River Jhelum lay like a turquoise ribbon winding through a paradise of green and amber. At the foot of the last decline, beside a bridge, Kashmiri officials waited to take toll of our belongings and examine all loads for contraband; and while they overhauled the truck, I sat down in its shadow.

Grim talked to the officials and so entertained them that

they neglected to open our important bundles, in which the unregistered rifles were concealed; and Chullunder Ghose explained to Kashmiris, who were loafing, looking on, overcurious, that I was suffering from a disease so contagious as to poison people if my breath should touch them.

That was all very well for the time being, but one of them, out of the kindness of his heart, went and fetched a Parsee doctor, who was making his way in a cart to the plains after a vacation spent in Srinagar.

The Parsee was as kind and fussy and insistent as if I had been his wife's relation. He not knowing more of the Kashmiri tongue than I did, it was easy enough to escape suspicion on the score of language, but I had to show him my mouth and the absence of any signs of sickness puzzled him. He took my temperature, and, finding that normal, invited me to strip myself and submit to a swift physical examination.

I refused for religious reasons—always a reliable excuse for anything in India, and though he continued to try to persuade me, making use of every argument a decent doctor could, I think he had about exhausted both his patience and enthusiasm and would have left me to rot of any disease I wished, but for one of those apparently insignificant incidents that so often upset calculations.

Narayan Singh, begging a ride on a government mulewagon, had gone forward into Srinagar to see about our lodgings for the night and there was nobody near our truck except the Parsee doctor and myself. One of our heavier loads, disarranged by the customs crew, teetered on the truck's edge and would have fallen on the Parsee, had I not jumped and caught it, guiding it to the ground. So far, well and good; but now habit took charge of me: instinctively, at once, without a second thought, I hove it back in place. It was a load that probably two normally active men would find it all they could do to lift.

The Parsee gaped at me; but the worst of it was that an English doctor, passing in an auto on his way to Rawalpindi, saw the incident and, knowing the Parsee, called out to him:

"Studying anatomy? By gad, where did you find that Hercules? What is he?"

The Parsee invited him to come and look, with the result that I was faced by two inquisitors instead of one, and jealousy, that was racial as well as professional, impelled them both to put me through another third degree. I had to rehearse my symptoms all over again, and it happened that the Englishman was one of those inquiring geniuses who take their profession extremely seriously.

It is easy enough to deceive a doctor, provided you avoid all technicalities and merely complain of agony; his anxiety to relieve you makes him take complaints for granted. He suspected me of some obscure nervous trouble, possibly due to overstrain, made me flex all my muscles, asked even what village I came from and of what disease my grandfather had died—nodded—made notes in a memorandum book—and offered me a seat in his auto to Rawalpindi, where he offered to treat me in the hospital free of charge.

Then Grim came to the rescue with a string of lies about a doctor in the Punjab who had recommended winter in the Kashmir Valley as a cure, and in the end the English doctor gave the Parsee a lift, the two driving off toward Rawalpindi discussing nervous maladies with the argumentative enthusiasm of professional zealots.

That would not have mattered, had they not continued the discussion that evening in the *dak*—a sort of hotel midway of the pass—where there was a large assorted company, some of whom joined in the conversation and were treated to a description of me, an account of my feat of strength and, no doubt, to some very interesting medical theories. However, we did not know that until later.

About nine o'clock the following night, in Srinagar, as we four sat around a lantern in a corner, with our backs against the wall of the warehouse behind Benjamin's agents' store, discussing what might have become of the son-in-law Mordecai, there entered a Kashmiri clerk who announced that a sahib wished to see us.

We fell into a panic, naturally. The word sahib is not applied exclusively to Europeans but we jumped to the conclusion that the British authorities had learned of our movements and had sent someone to investigate. We had had to wait a day in Srinagar because of news that a police patrol was coming in along the Ladakh road, and to have met the police would have been inconvenient, to say the least of it, if only because we had unregistered fire-arms hidden in our packs.

After a hurried consultation we decided to receive this sahib, whoever he might be, where we sat in the semi-darkness, giving as our excuse that we were travel-tired and that one of us was ill. I wrapped my head in the shawl again and leaned back in the corner.

A Tibetan entered, dressed in ready-made European khaki. He announced his name as Tsang-yang. After staring at us for a moment he sat down on our carpet uninvited, which was no good sign; and he began at once to speak to us in English, which was worse.

He was an ugly man, enormous as to height although awkwardly proportioned, with extremely bright, alert Mongolian eyes. The suit he wore hung badly on his Oriental frame, having worked up at the sleeves and knees; but he spoke English very well indeed and possessed an air of confidence that betokened long association with Europeans. We learned later that he came originally from the Province of Kam in Tibet, where nearly all the men are giants in stature.

Though he had been sufficiently ill-mannered to sit down without waiting for an invitation, and though his grin was impudent, he addressed us as "learned sirs"—a phrase implying deep respect, because Tibetans regard learning as the only royal road to virtue. The combination of insolence and politeness seemed to give the clue to his intentions. Grim whispered the word "blackmail."

Narayan Singh stared angrily, doing his best to create an inhospitable atmosphere—an art in which the Sikhs excel when so disposed (as they can do the opposite with equal grace). It was Chullunder Ghose who bore the burden of the conversation.

"Son of impertinence, what do you want?" he demanded. "Only death has the right to interrupt four worthy men at prayer."

"Pray on," said the Tibetan. "I shall wait."

Chullunder Ghose snorted. "Sit on a dung-hill and smell roses! The Lords of Life to whom we offer meditation prefer thought unpolluted by diabolism! Make your interruption and go swiftly!"

"I was recently in jail," said the Tibetan, as if he thought the boast should recommend him.

"I could have guessed it," said Chullunder Ghose.

"In jail I met Tsang-Mondrong," said our visitor. "Seven days after he entered the jail, I left it, and with him I made a bargain that I should find you as soon as might be and should follow you with all speed. I learned you were at Benjamin the Jew's in Delhi. Thence I traced you to Rawalpindi, where a letter from Benjamin overtook you, warning you against me. But I read the letter before you received it. At Rawalpindi I lost sight of you, because you were rather clever in spreading rumors that you were turning south again. But we have a saying: 'When in doubt, turn northward,' so I took the road to Srinagar, though I despaired of finding you."

"Despair was not mutual. You give us bellyache," Chullunder Ghose assured him.

"But at the *dak,* where I sat in shadow close to the veranda, I overheard men speaking of a very strong Kash-

miri, suffering from an affliction of the mouth that interfered with speech. One of Benjamin's assistants having spoken to me of the strength of him whose skin was stained—how he lifted the bales in the store and took his amusement wrestling with the Sikh, whom he always defeated easily—I hoped again. I knew that one who spoke Kashmiri badly might pretend he could not speak at all. I followed. I am here."

"And where do you go from here? You have permission to go swiftly," said Chullunder Ghose.

"I go where you go," the Tibetan answered.

He spoke naively. Nine times out of ten when a Tibetan tells you frankly he will go with you it is safe to presume he is friendly and dependable. The tenth time it would be wiser to trust a snake.

Narayan Singh spoke suddenly. "What were you in jail for?" he demanded.

"Nothing," the man answered. "A policeman lied about me, saying I was fighting in the street, whereas I merely looked on. Why should I fight in the street, and with whom? I have never fought in the street in all my life."

Chullunder Ghose leaned toward him, pointing with two fingers at his eyes.

"I, too, am liar when it suits me!" he remarked. "Where did you learn English?"

"At Mission School, Darjiling."

"Where did you get that scar on cheek-bone? Also from missionary? What were you formerly? Monk?"

The Tibetan nodded. Regretting the admission, he began, too late, to shake his head. Chullunder Ghose mocked him:

"Being monk, you never fought in streets of Lhassa? Not at festival of New Year, when monks have charge of city and all shop-keepers shut doors and windows for fear of them? You were expelled from Lhassa! You ran away to escape flogging or execution!"

"No," said the Tibetan. "I left the Dre-pung Monastery of my own accord. I wished to learn foreign knowledge. My superior in the monastery had put me to a great shame—I, who did nothing to deserve it. I was beaten. This mark on my cheek is from the whip they used."

"Save and except that it is the mark of a knife wound, that is a very probable story!" said Chullunder Ghose. "You left the monastery in disgrace, running away without kissing the abbot good-by or taking anything except the monastery money! Nevertheless, when Tsang-Mondrong, who is paid agent in confidence of Tibetan authorities, finds you in jail, he trusts you! You are not paid agent of Tibetan Government? I bet you are! I think you learned English in Pekin,

China. I think that you were formerly Tibetan spy of Chinese Government, until the Chinese were defeated and no longer paid you stipulated sum per month. I think now you would like to return to Tibet, because you are homesick for your gruesome wilderness—and you think we are on our way to Tibet—and you hope to reestablish yourself by betraying us after you shall have stolen from us all you can lay your hands on. Is it not so?"

"I am sure you will not go to Tibet until the spring, because the snow is in the passes," the man answered. "But I think you will go then, because a man named Rait is there already, and he wrote a letter to that one" (he pointed at me) "which you yourself delivered."

"So you would like to come with us, in the hope of finding Rait sahib? Is that it?"

"If you go to Tibet, I go with you!" Tsang-yang answered.

I abandoned my rôle of sick man then and took a hand in the discussion, not exactly figuratively; took him by the neck, flung him into the corner behind me and sat on him. Narayan Singh took one of his arms and twisted it, but there was no need; his head had hit the wall. Grim stuffed a piece of sacking in his mouth and Chullunder Ghose bound the gag in place with long strips of calico.

It was a simple swift solution of the difficulty for the moment, but we did not accomplish it without a certain amount of noise and for several minutes we waited to see whether the disturbance had attracted attention from the front part of the store.

No one came, but that was no proof we were not being quietly observed through some crack in the partition; and though it was likely we could trust Benjamin's Kashmiri agents up to a certain point, it would be foolish as well as unfair to expect them to run grave risks with the authorities on our account.

Chullunder Ghose, with a fat man's sense of humor, did his best to make our flesh creep.

"What now to do with dead Tibetan?" he remarked.

But he was not dead; I could feel him breathing.

"The brute must come with us," said Grim. "If we turn him loose the very least he'll do will be to betray Benjamin."

"And up yonder in high mountains there are many slippery places!" said Chullunder Ghose.

"Let us go," said Narayan Singh, getting up and beginning to remove the sacks that we had heaped on the prisoner, who lay still.

"Search him first!" Chullunder Ghose advised. "First aid to

restoring consciousness is to turn all pockets inside out and feel for money between skin and undershirt!"

It was Grim's quick fingers that removed a leather wallet from a bandage over the man's ribs. We covered up our prisoner with sacks again and sat down in a circle to examine the find by the light of our smoky lantern.

On the outside of the wallet were the letters E. R. stamped in gold. Inside it was Rait's passport, some receipts, a woman's letter, and a photograph of me!

The receipts were all for trade-goods—matches, dyes, cooking utensils, and silk that Rait had bought to take with him to Tibet in his guise of merchant; they were made out to bearer and marked "goods to be delivered at place agreed on road to Gyangtse."

The letter from the woman had no right to be in anybody's wallet. She was an author with an international reputation, who had learned of Rait's intention to visit Tibet and was trying to dissuade him. Her passionate appeals to him to come to Europe and "continue a soul-communion begun in Simla" would have been burned by any decent fellow instantly, to prevent their falling into strangers' hands.

That letter in Rait's wallet was a searchlight thrown on his character. It scandalized Chullunder Ghose, who is no sufferer from squeamishness, but having been Rait's partner for a number of years I had understood something of his cynicism. I was about to burn the letter, when Grim snatched it from me.

"Didn't you see the use he's made of it?" he asked.

He held it close up to the lantern. Some of the words had been faintly underscored with an instrument—perhaps a thumb-nail—that had scratched the paper without penetrating deep. Grim—hunting for the underscored words—read the message:

"Buried — and — spot — marked — to — satisfy — you — this — is — right — direction —— Look — out — for — indications —of — turning — toward — West — this — side — of — Lhassa —— Remember — it — is — hard — to — look — into — fierce — light — which — casts — black — shadow — consequently — don't — expect — important — discovery — without — nerve-racking — experiences —— This — fool's — letter — doesn't — deserve — to — be — put — to — such — good — use — but — [and here a whole sentence was underscored] the very universe seems to be built on a foundation of broken hearts, so come at once, come quickly!"

Grim wrote down the message and I burned the woman's letter. It was plain enough that Rait had left Lhassa, had taken

some trail westward, and had left that wallet buried by the road to mark the trail for me. But two things were not at all clear: why had he carried with him into Tibet documents that, if found on his person, would convict him of being a foreigner? And how had the wallet come into Tsang-yang's possession?

There was nothing to be learned just then from the Tibetan, who was still unconscious from the contact with his head against the wall. We decided not to let him know that we had found the wallet, but to wait and see what happened.

Meanwhile, what to do with him? There was a back door to the warehouse and, near that, a barrow with bicycle wheels and a canvas cover, not unlike an ambulance. We tied him securely on that, arranging our lighter baggage around and over him, almost breaking down the frail conveyance, which Narayan Singh and I pushed out through the back door, while Grim and Chullunder Ghose went to make excuses to our hosts, who turned out to be only too glad to be rid of us, barrow and all.

They explained to Grim exactly where the ponies were, that had been bought on Benjamin's instruction, and promised to send our heavier loads next day by porter to an empty storehouse in a ravine beside the road to Ladakh, where we could repack them if we wished, and load the ponies at our leisure, without anyone being the wiser.

It was a cold black night. The north wind, whistling from the Karakorum Mountains, seemed to make the bright stars shiver and reduce themselves to pin-points. The River Jhelum, flowing through the midst of Srinagar, lapped noisily against the bridge piles. There was a lonely feeling—a foretaste of winter—sharpened by a few bright lights from the hotels, where the last of the summer visitors were making the most of the season's end and probably dreading the hot plains of India as much as we dreaded the snow-bound passes leading into Tibet.

But we were off. And though we sneaked into the night like criminals, the thought was comforting that we had caught the only man likely to betray us. When he recovered consciousness he would be a nuisance and a danger, but not nearly so dangerous as he would have been had we left him behind without knowing he was on our trail.

Let your thoughts dwell on this for a while, since the tree of meditation beareth wholesome fruit and he whose duty is to teach should set examples, though he know the answers, yet withholding them:

The dogs bark when the caravan moves on. The dogs fight when the caravan has gone. The caravan proceedeth, and the dogs lick, each his own wounds, in the dust.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER FIVE

PAINLESS PARKER RAMSDEN, AND THE TALE TOLD BY THE DEVIL'S SPIES, TSANG-MONDRONG AND TSANG-YANG.

WE TRUNDLED the barrow all night along the road that follows the Sind Valley, startled by shadows that leaped at us out of the darkness, and by night-prowling scavenger dogs that yelped and ran. It does not take much to scare people who are on the run, and Rait's mysterious warning of nerve-racking experiences had filled us with foreboding.

Long before morning our prisoner came to his senses and announced the fact by shouting at the top of his lungs, but Narayan Singh prodded his ribs a few times with a sharp stick and he took the hint, lying still after that until we came to a halt at daybreak.

The Ladakh Road is used by countless peasants, some of whom would have been sure to take exception to the rubber-tired barrow. It was neither in keeping with our guise of honest mrchants nor in any way suited to the nature of the road ahead. We looked like prosperous men, who could well afford horses or porters, but we were likely to be reported as thieves escaping with our loot unless we got rid of the barrow and invented a likely story to account for our loads by the wayside.

So we removed the wheels and dumped the barrow into a stream, where the reeds concealed it. Then Grim and Narayan Singh took off their shoes and made scores of naked footprints in the dust, while I took Tsang-yang in hand.

The Tibetan assumed an air of indifference, chafing his wrists where the cords had hurt him a bit and obeying without comment when I told him to stand in front of me. Not knowing much about Tibetans yet, I mistook the attitude for one of sullen, watchful waiting.

"You think you will appeal to the first passers-by," I said. "If so, we will accuse you of being a bandit—one of many who attacked us in the night and made our porters run away.

We will say we captured you by hitting you over the head, showing the bruise on your head, in proof of it. And if you deny it, we will add that the bandits ran off with our women, and the first peasants who come along will beat you half to death. Do you like the prospect?"

"What do you wish?" he asked, turning up his thumbs.

Suddenly he put his tongue out at me—a slobbery, big tongue that looked almost too big to withdraw. I was minded to hit him to teach him manners, but Chullunder Ghose came to his rescue, having watched with deliberate interest, as he sat with his shoes off, chafing tired feet.

"Don't hit! That is Tibetan abjectness of white flag, belly upward, all four feet in air! He is law of heredity functioning! He is product of bad food, blizzards and religion!"

The babu was right. Veneer had peeled off. The Tibetan had relapsed into the savagery of the State of Kam, where nature in the raw and superstition in authority present men with facts they must accept and suffer under or else perish. The monastery monks might whip him again now without risk of reprisals. Rightly handled he was ready to submit to anything—although how long the relapse would last might be another question.

"Remember!" I warned. "If I catch you speaking to a stranger I shall simply say you are a woman-stealer and you will be beaten to death."

It was Grim's suggestion that I should bully him while Chullunder Ghose should pretend to pity him: a sort of third degree that might induce him to confide in one of us.

So I made him gather fuel for our breakfast fire, calling him a dog who would eat at each meal twice what his labor was worth. Chullunder Ghose, outpouring mock compassion, called him "little Kam-kin" and inquired whether he liked chupatties burned on both sides or only on one.

Chullunder Ghose believes himself an expert at chupattie making, but as we did not want to unpack the loads the only tools he had were a spoon and an upturned biscuit-tin, whose solder melted, letting the flat cakes fall into the smoky fire.

However, we had eaten after a fashion when the first of the peasantry came in sight—sixteen or eighteen men in single file on their way to the magistrate's court in Srinagar. The five in the lead were mounted on half-starved ponies; they were principals in a lawsuit and continued on their way, refusing to have anything to do with us, but the others were merely going as spectators and were eager to stop and listen to any form of entertainment. We told them how our porters had all run away and left us when we were attacked by bandits.

They believed the story, because there were the marks of many footprints in the road and because the police patrol was known to have returned to Srinagar the day before, thus officially opening the season for highway robberies. When we suggested they should carry our loads toward the nearest village they refused pointblank—then sat down to discuss the matter, bent on discovering exactly how grave our predicament might be before setting a price on their services.

We were utterly at their mercy. If we had offered them a high price we might have aroused suspicion that we were fugitives from justice; yet we did not dare let them proceed on their way and tell all Srinagar about us.

However, at the end of fifteen minutes' talking it occurred to one of them to ask exactly who we were, and he began with me (I suppose, because I was the biggest). That gave Chullunder Ghose his opportunity.

He described me as a great physician gifted with powers of divination and possessed of infallible remedies for curing barrenness of acres, camels, cows and wives.

"He is puller of teeth, being known as Painless Parker—which is Greek word meaning altruist. He is setter of bones. He is increaser of longevity. He cured the King of the United States of leprosy. The Crown Prince of Switzerland conferred on him the Order of the Garter for healing him of so-called Republican Tendencies, which is a terrible disease. The Emperor of France offered him his only daughter in marriage, on condition he should live in the Louvre, which honor he refused, however, on account of insufficiency of palace furnishings. He is now on his way to cure the gallstones of a chieftain of Ladakh by means of magic poultices."

Before he had finished his nonsense every one of them felt symptoms of disease, which, after silent diagnosis and much frowning, I proceeded to treat with equally imaginary remedies produced out of an ancient Chinese tea-chest Benjamin had given me. There were Chinese pictures on the inside of the lid, quite easily mistaken for a gallery of Buddhist saints, and although these villagers were far from being Buddhists they were none the less impressed with a sense of my sanctity and mistook the taste of Worcestershire Sauce for the semi-divine flavor of Tantrist drugs. Grim made them avert their eyes in silence while I mixed the stuff with whisky and Narayan Singh chanted a mantra, of which neither he nor I nor anyone could guess the meaning.

Then, when they had all been dosed, and had rubbed their stomachs and felt wonderfully better, they bethought them of their village headman, who had abscess of the jaw. No sooner thought thar acted on: they seized our loads—except the

biggest, naturally, which Grim compelled Tsang-yang to carry to prevent his civilized veneer from filming over him again—and hurried toward their village, chattering like children, with their heads too full of my wizardry to remember our tale of the midnight hold-up.

Even if they had remembered it, the danger of their telling tales about us for the present had entirely vanished. I was their treasure trove, and they proposed to keep me to themselves until my usefulness was squeezed out to the last drop; tales of a mighty magician who could heal all manner of diseases were likely, they knew well, to bring too swift investigation from a health department whose officials believed in such heresies as cleanliness and vaccination—and who were known to be extremely jealous of genuine thaumaturgists.

So, though we passed at least two hundred peasants on our way, their questions were not answered, and the merely mild interest we aroused was likely to be forgotten long before those dawdlers reached the shops of Srinagar.

At the end of four or five hours' walking we reached a filthy village, where the headman lay groaning in agony in a dark stone hut, under a thatched roof where the rats were nesting; and I had to operate on him at once before a breathless audience that filled the room. I would have funked it if Grim had not been there, but Grim is afraid of nothing except fear itself, and he stood at my elbow, urging me in whispers.

"He'll die anyhow if you don't do something. His whole system is being poisoned by the abscess. You may kill him, or it may be your lucky day—and his! Go to it."

Whoever has managed mining camps a hundred miles or so from a rail-head has incidentally performed all manner of minor operations as often as not without any proper instrument or a drum-and-fife band to drown the victim's yells. So I was not quite green at the business. Benjamin had supplied me with the very latest thing in forceps.

At the risk of poisoning the man I drowned his pain with half-a-syringeful of local anesthetic, gave that time to work, and pulled out all the teeth on one side of his head. One molar broke and I had to fish for it, but when I had done the poor wretch was alive and grateful; he offered me three chickens and a month-old calf (born too late in the year to be likely to live) and beat his only son on the shoulders with a carved Kashmiri stool for not making me a suitable obeisance.

That was naturally not the whole of it; success involved responsibility, and Chullunder Ghose had advertised me much

too well. My next patient was a woman with shriveled breasts, whose son had died a quarter of a century ago, and who now demanded an elixir to renew her youth. I gave her a full dose of Worcestershire Sauce and whisky, and Grim told her to eat two handfuls of sugar by the light of the next new moon, which she must see over her left shoulder without thinking of her age; if she dared to think about her age the remedy would fail, but otherwise she would have twins within twelve months.

She might have had twins there and then, so far as my standing went in that community. Men who would have dreaded a genuine doctor's visit more than the plague began to try to force presents on me and to beg for stuff that should make their wives bear children. I was busy lancing boils and dosing more or less imaginary stomach-aches all afternoon, and when night came there was nothing for it but to accept the headman's hospitality.

By that time I would have given almost anything for the privilege of speech, and that infernal rascal Chullunder Ghose, enjoying my predicament, did his utmost to make me miserable, telling tales about me that would have made Münchhausen blush. He explained my silence by saying that my power to heal depended on it; a great hermit had conferred the magic on me on condition that I should not speak to anyone for thirty years, of which nineteen had still to run. Tsang-yang, he said, had to be silent, too, because he was my *chela* who was going to be taught how to pull teeth after ten years' apprenticeship, provided he did not speak one word in all that time; for each word that he should speak until then, one month would be added to his sentence.

The villagers mischievously did their best to ruin Tsang-yang's prospects by inducing him to talk, but Narayan Singh sat next to him, growling threats of mayhem into his ear. The Tibetan was still under the spell of that half-religious, half-climatic consciousness of being licked and though, as we discovered later, he had another motive for submitting to us, it was the Sikh's threats just then that appealed to his imagination and made him obedient.

We slept in the headman's bug-infested hut—an honor that we only conferred on him after he had promised to supply us with as many porters as we needed. We had hard work to keep him to his word, because he wanted us to stay and hold another clinic, for the honor it would do his village, but we got off, about two hours after dawn, behind a string of men who sadly lacked enthusiasm now that they knew there was nothing more to be had from us.

They dawdled, and delay was likely to prove fatal, since a

chill wind from the northwest hinted at falling snow and, far ahead of us, we caught rare glimpses of the mountain peaks through a curtain of grayish cloud. It might mean death if storms should overtake us in the Zogi-la, but if we could hurry through the pass before the first heavy storm the drifts would close the door to India behind us.

So where the road branched off toward a village where the ponies were supposed to be waiting, we divided forces, paying the porters and sending them home. We left Chullunder Ghose, who was foot-sore, along with Narayan Singh to guard the loads, while Grim and I went off with Tsang-yang to find the ponies. The trail wound around the shoulders of hills and crossed valley bottoms where the brooks spread into swamps, so we lost the way twice, but arrived at the village, dog-tired, shortly after sunset—only to discover that the villagers had mistaken Benjamin's instructions and had sent all twelve animals to await us at a village half-a-day's march farther along the Ladakh Road.

After a lot of arguing the headman agreed to send for the ponies and have them brought back along the road toward us the following morning; then we returned, along a trail that had been difficult to find by daylight. Well for us that we had brought Tsang-yang! Tibetans all see marvelously in the dark. His hardly human-looking eyes picked out the landmarks he had only seen once, from the opposite direction; and his awkward-looking legs, that looked slouchy and weak when the going was moderately level, swung along now over rise and descent at a speed that was nearly too much for us.

We began to feel faith in the man, he took such pains to guide us and did it so cheerfully. Grim has a way of gaining the affection of most savages, less by what he says and does, than by being what he is; they simply take to him. Tsang-yang had begun to behave toward him like a stray dog adopting a master, and I believe that if nothing unexpected had happened to corrupt him again he might have turned into a faithful servant.

But the unexpected did happen. Near midnight Tsang-yang came to a stand at last between two rounded boulders, and Grim and I felt sure he had lost the way, neither of us recognizing the looming cliff on one side nor the echoing gorge along which the wind went whistling beneath us. But when we began to speak Tsang-yang gestured for silence, and presently we heard the unmistakable voice of Chullunder Ghose.

"Am apogee of ignorance. . . . Not knowing who I am, can't say. . . . Have no proof of identity. . . . Have lost myself. . . . This man beside me is the devil. . . . No need,

therefore, to go to him; you have come to him. . . . You may remain here and freeze, same as me. . . . Recognize you? . . . I no longer recognize myself. . . . Am mystically minded meditator much confused by philosophic thinking. . . . Otherwise, why do you think I would sit here in chilly wind on heap of merchandise, like Krishna on a dung-hill?"

I crept through the dark and Grim followed. Presently I made out our fat babu's shape, huddled in a shawl, with Narayan Singh sitting bolt-upright beside him. Facing them a man stood leaning on what seemed to be a rifle with an old-fashioned three-edged bayonet fixed; he looked like a policeman in a khaki uniform. To be skewered by a bayonet is no amusement, so I crawled in the darkest shadow until I reached Narayan Singh and whispered to him from behind.

Chullunder Ghose gulped at the sound of my voice—almost screamed with terror; but Narayan Singh, without looking at me, shot forward like a statue come to life and rushed the man in khaki, who raised his weapon to defend himself. It turned out to be only a long stick. In another second he was down under Narayan Singh with a knee on his chest and his right arm twisted into helplessness.

I struck a match and held it close to him. He was Tsang-Mondrong, whom we thought we had left safely cared for in the Delhi jail!

Tsang-yang, mortally afraid and sheltering himself behind our pile of loads, urged us to kill him at once.

"He is a devil! He will tell you lies! He will betray you!"

But the worst of it was that Tsang-yang's semi-western air of independence was beginning to return. He was afraid, but fear had made a man of him again. He even threatened us. He swore that unless we should kill Tsang-Mondrong he would run away himself and warn the police that we were on our way to Tibet.

"Give me a weapon. You hold him, and let me kill him," he suggested.

We stood them both in front of us and sat down with our backs against the loads. Neither man offered to try to escape; they were both too tired. Each seemed to suspect the other, and Tsang-Mondrong answered our questions readily enough at first, because he feared Tsang-yang might answer them otherwise.

He told us he had been released from Delhi jail by the order of some visiting official who considered he had been condemned without sufficient evidence. He had started after us without an hour's delay, following clues left purposely by Tsang-yang.

Tsang-yang promptly denied that he had left such clues.

"A dog he is! Like a dog he smelled the trail!"

But at that Tsang-Mondrong flew at him, calling him an eight-faced liar, and we had to separate them, fighting like a pair of windmills.

As soon as he recovered breath Tsang-Mondrong admitted frankly that he had not expected to overtake us much this side of Leh, in Ladakh, and added that he had come slowly because he was sick from the food they had given him in jail. He did not turn uncommunicative until I asked him whether he had known Rait. He denied it, and his expression and attitude changed instantly.

"No, you didn't know him!" said Chullunder Ghose. "Like damn-fool you thought you could steal from him! But he having kicked you in belly, I bet you remember him!"

"How did you come to possess Rait's wallet?" Grim demanded.

Tsang-Mondrong promptly denied ever having seen the wallet. Tsang-yang, probably imagining that he himself had lost it in the scuffle in the warehouse at Srinagar, and moved by some spirit of lying for the sake of lying, swore that he, too, knew nothing about any wallet; whereat Tsang-Mondrong began cursing him in voluble Tibetan and we had to separate them once more.

Narayan Singh went and stood between them to keep them from flying at each other's throats, and Tsang-Mondrong swore there was a lot of money in the wallet, the amount increasing as conviction grew that Tsang-yang had made away with it. The transfer of possession, it appeared, had been a very simple matter: the jail officials had taken it from Tsang-Mondrong, who claimed that it was not his property, so after a perfunctory examination it was sealed and, at Tsang-Mondrong's request, given to Tsang-yang on his release, a week later, for delivery to its rightful owner. However, Tsang-Mondrong refused to say why he had wished Tsang-yang to have it.

But by that time Tsang-yang was in a white-hot rage; the other had struck him under the breastbone besides calling him a thief; the mixture of agony and indignation drove the whole story of the wallet spluttering out of him.

"Tsang-Mondrong is a snake whose liver crawls with lice! He followed Rait sahib across the border, beyond Gyangtse, to the land of U.* There he approached him, offering his services as guide. The chiling†, knowing who he was, could not help but accept, since otherwise Tsang-Mondrong would

*A province in Tibet.
†Foreigner, i. e. Rait.

have instantly betrayed him. All this was told me in the jail in Delhi, by Tsang-Mondrong, who is an eater of eggs and a drinker of milk and a tobacco-smoker* among other vices that he has!

"Tsang-Mondrong said the chiling Rait made two or three attempts to poison him. But it was doubtless he who tried to poison the chiling. Watching, he saw the chiling bury a wallet under a little pyramid of stones on which all passers-by hang prayer flags—such a cairn as exist in Tibet by the hundred thousand. Thereafter the chiling set a mark on the side of the cliff, and beneath that, under a flat stone, he put a written message, saying where the wallet had been hidden.

"The chiling, who was cunningly disguised, went forward with more than twelve mule loads of matches and silk and indigo; and that day, and the next, Tsang-Mondrong—whose soul shall inhabit a she-dog in his next life—had no opportunity to turn back and un-dig the wallet; but on the third night thereafter he did so. All this he told me in the Delhi jail. But I have never seen the wallet."

In the pause that followed that profound misstatement Chullunder Ghose tried to break Tsang-Mondrong's silence.

"Son of purity and virtue," he demanded, "why in the name of Chenresi and all your buttery deities did you not at once betray the chiling, seeing that you now had proof against him?"

But before Tsang-Mondrong could answer, Tsang-yang resumed the tale:

"He could not! The chiling had vanished as if the earth had swallowed him! Tsang-Mondrong, whose brains are a chicken's entrails, hoped to extort much money before finally betraying him. But the chiling had vanished, and Tsang-Mondrong said to himself, 'If I tell such a tale I shall be mocked and beaten, for who would believe it?' But now that he had the wallet he understood that one should follow before long, for whom the chiling had left that message; so he returned to Darjiling to act as guide for officers on shooting expeditions, meaning to keep his eyes wide open. All these things he told me in the jail, but I have never seen the wallet, which, moreover, had no money in it. He is a black-souled devil's offspring and a liar, whose oath is no good. I swear I have not seen the wallet."

"Why, then, did he send you in pursuit of us?" I asked.

"Because he wished to follow you, and because to betray you on this side of the border would not be so profitable as

*Three unspeakable offenses against Tibetan custom.

on the other side, where he can first extort money from you by threats, and then arrange to have you robbed, before betraying you to the authorities."

"Sin-scorning pilgrim of the inner way—adorer of Chenre-si, tell me," said Chullunder Ghose, "why did Tsang-Mondrong give the wallet to *you?*"

Tsang-yang was about to deny again that he had ever seen the wallet, but Tsang-Mondrong found speech at last and burst out with denunciation:

"Why? Because this Tsang-yang is a renegade monk, who knows too much about the insides of religion to be honest! He is a driver of hard bargains. May his soul be separated from his body! He refused to have anything to do with you or me unless I gave him the wallet as security."

"And do you still propose to come with us?" Grim asked him.

The man nodded.

"Why?"

"Because I must find the chiling Rait. And because I know all about you, Jimgrim. You, too, are looking for that chiling, and men say you always succeed in everything you attempt."

"Why do you want to find the chiling Rait?"

"I want to see his soul torn from his body!"

"He is not known as Rait in Tibet, is he?"

"No, but as Lung-tok."

"How do you suppose he disappeared? Do you think he was murdered?"

"Not he! That chiling ragyaba* is far too cunning! He buried the wallet with no other purpose than to get rid of me—may dogs devour him! It is clear to me now that he let me see him bury it, well knowing I would return and dig it up, but he took care I shouldn't slip away from him to do that until the third night following. So by the time I had gone all that long way back to get the wallet, and had turned again to follow him, he had had plenty of time to disappear; but how he disappeared, with all those mules and three servants, I know not. And now another thing is clear to me: that chiling is a crafty reader of men's minds! He knew that having lost him I would return to Darjiling and watch for whoever should follow; thus he thought that the wallet might probably fall into your hands, learned sir, he thinking I would behave to you as I did to him, offering my services."

*The foulest word of abuse in the Tibetan language. Ragyabas are outcasts who live in unspeakable filth on the outskirts of towns. It is they who have the disposition of all corpses.

"You may go. You may go and betray us," said Grim. "One word from you to the authorities in Srinagar and they'll send mounted men to bring us back."

"Nay, Jimgrim! You are more cunning than the chiling Rait! You would give me the slip just as he did. I come with you. If you pay me well enough I will be your friend and not betray you."

"Rait, you say, calls himself Lung-tok. What if I find him?" Grim asked.

Tsang-Mondrong's hideous face transformed itself into a horror that even the darkness could not hide. It was hatred, naked and determined. But he made no answer.

I, too, strove for many things that fools can win and wise men weary of; until I asked of my inner self—what goods are worth the getting? Because strength was in me, and I would not waste such substance as I had.

And the answer, which came like the sap to the limbs of a tree, from within not without, was, Seek manhood; and if riches help thee, use them: or if poverty assist thee, use that; but be sure thy goal is manhood and naught else. For all things shall depart from thee, like flesh from off thy bones, when death comes, but thy manhood is thy soul's robe, shielding it from shame.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FANGED JAWS OF THE ZOGI-LA

MEN are not rational when they have made their minds up; if they were, nothing would ever get accomplished, because there would be too many reasons for not taking the next step forward. But we like to pretend we are rational, since self-conceit is half the art of being happy. We four actually held a conference, out of earshot of the two Tibetans, to decide whether we should continue to try to do what we were wholly bent on doing!

Last words being weightiest, Grim told Chullunder Ghose to speak first.

"Damn foolishness is all right if persisted in," said the babu. "It is being half-clever and half-foolish that gets people into trouble. In foolishness, it is the biggest fool who wins—and there are a lot of slippery places between here and Tibet; let us sample same, and something may turn up."

Narayan Singh spoke next, and we all knew what he would say, although he worded it unexpectedly:

"Do we wish to die in bed? If so, why did we start on this adventure?"

I merely said it would be safer to take the two Tibetans with us than to leave them to work mischief at our rear. Being four to their two we could probably manage them, and they would be useful to help pack and lead the ponies.

Grim said "All right," and that ended the discussion.

We breakfasted beside the road and concealed ourselves and the loads in a gorge out of sight of passing villagers until nearly noon when the ponies came. The sight of those sturdy little rascals, bred in Tibetan wilderness and toughened by experience of packwork on the mountain trails, made even our two Tibetans good-humored; in their anxiety to show us how well they could manage a pack-saddle they forgot to quarrel. Then a strange thing happened.

The ponies had come down the pass toward us with drooping heads and an end-of-a-journey look about them. The moment three or four of them were loaded and we turned them all toward the mountains they began to kick and squeal like colts. Our two Tibetans began singing. There was a chill wind and the far-off mountain tops looked gray and gloomy, but the spirits of the whole party rose like mercury in a thermometer; nor did they fall again until we turned aside into a valley to find the empty store shed and await the heavier loads that Benjamin's agents had promised to send by porter.

There we waited a whole day in abject gloom, and twice we had to separate Tsang-Mondrong and Tsang-yang, who snarled at each other like cat and dog, each urging us at intervals to kill the other one and be done with a rogue who would certainly murder us otherwise. The only time they left off quarreling was when Chullunder Ghose tried to question them about the mysterious evil hinted at by Benjamin and by Rait in his letter to me; they lapsed then into a mutually supporting silence, glancing at each other, staring at us open-mouthed, pretending not to understand the questions, which they were obviously unwilling or afraid to answer.

But when the porters came at last and we had loaded all the ponies and turned northward toward the dreaded Zogi-la, everybody's spirits rose again. The ponies kicked and squealed and the Tibetans sang; Chullunder Ghose laughed at the blisters that tortured his fat feet; we all felt that, storm or no storm, we would fight our way across the pass by some means.

The road from Srinagar to Leh winds for two hundred miles through the grandest scenery on earth—a well-made road with bridges over all the streams. Each height revealed new heights beyond us, only to be reached by crossing valleys gouged out of the rock by bawling streams and glaciers, long vanished, that had left their worn and littered boulders on the slopes. The ponies were lightly loaded and we might have ridden, but we proposed to get ourselves in good condition and to reserve the ponies' strength for the terrific struggle later on, so we did the thirty miles a day on foot, making the fat drip off Chullunder Ghose in spite of the raw wind.

But our determination to save the ponies had an unforeseen result. It made our Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong almost friendly, since it gave them a grievance in common. The Tibetans have a proverb that they quote at you perpetually on the trail:

"If a horse will not carry you up-hill, he is no horse; if you will not walk down-hill, you are no man."

They were determined to ride up-hill and used every possible trick to circumvent us, making the ponies stray in order to be told to go and catch them, and take their time about it, and come along behind us riding on top of a load when we were out of sight beyond a rise. It did not matter how many times we knocked them off a pony; they were always on again at the first chance, and what they regarded as an insult to their manhood brought them more and more together making common cause against us.

Chullunder Ghose did his best to keep on friendly terms with Tsang-yang, pretending to try to persuade Grim and me to let the fellow ride for pity's sake; and I bullied him unmercifully, hoping that might lead him to confide in the babu. But the only result was that the two Tibetans pitied each other and loathed us more and more. They began to talk together much more than we relished.

So to find out what they were discussing we made new arrangements for the night. We had two tents and hitherto, in order to keep them apart, Grim and I had slept in one tent with one of them, while the other shared the smaller tent with Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose. Now we put the two of them to sleep together, while we four used the larger tent, and in the night Grim crept out to the smaller tent to listen.

They were discussing whether or not to betray us to the authorities at Leh. Each seemed afraid that the other might do that in any event, or else that some accident would make us known to the authorities, in which case the chance of getting a reward for our betrayal, as well as the equally tempting chance of robbing us later on, would vanish into thin air.

Nevertheless, they both seemed to prefer to help us to cross the forbidden border into Tibet, where we would be entirely at their mercy, but though they swore long rituals of oaths, neither man could quite persuade himself to trust the other.

Next morning Chullunder Ghose reopened the quarrel between them by regaling Tsang-yang with tales that he said Tsang-Mondrong had told of him.

"Yesterday, he told me, you were turned out of the Drepung Monastery for having put poison in your abbot's food, and also because it was discovered you ate chicken meat and eggs, smoked tobacco, and were the father of nine illegitimate children."

"Then he told of me only the half of what is true about himself!" said Tsang-yang, and for a day or two there was a reassuring state of enmity between them.

But thirty miles a day soon lays the leagues behind, and they buried their enmity once more as we approached the Zogi-la Pass, leaning into wind that nearly tore the skin off us. For a whole day before we reached it we could feel the imminence of snow, and the fact that we had passed no travelers coming southward augured small prospect of our finding the pass open. The whole horizon was gray with clouds; the ever-increasing wind, howling along lonely gorges, made our eyes water so that we could hardly see the way, and already, at a height of about eleven thousand feet, Chullunder Ghose was suffering from cold and dizziness.

Our two Tibetans appeared to dread the passes more than we did, having had experience. The nearer we came to the Zogi-la the more they urged us not to make haste, arguing it would be wiser to camp on some wind-swept level where the snow would not lie, and there to await the first storm, than to be caught in the midst of the pass in a blizzard with the wind against us. But their argument only aroused our suspicion: if it should happen that they knew we were being followed, they would naturally try to delay our march and prevent us from putting the snow-filled pass between us and pursuit.

And besides, there was the psychology of delay to reckon with. Whether or not, as they said, it would be easier to cross over the drifted snow than to fight our way through against a storm, there was no doubt that to postpone the crossing of your Rubicon is bad generalship. Difficulties tackled and overcome at the start encourage you to greater effort later on; a policy of waiting for the early difficulties to resolve themselves rots determination.

But when we camped one evening, within two hundred paces of the entrance of the pass, snow had already begun to fall and the wind was howling through the gorge with such force that we could hardly pitch camp on the only level place beside the road where there was any shelter. It was impossible to drive pegs, so we weighted the tent down with rocks and used most of our loads for a wind-break. Then we blanketed the ponies, fed them extravagantly in a hollow fifty yards away, and turned in, all in one tent.

The others fell asleep at once, but I was restless. The howling wind filled me with a strange foreboding of calamity; and it was cold, although we were huddled close together and I lay under a yak-skin overcoat. For another thing, I lay between the two Tibetans and the laced tent-opening, and I had not yet grown used to their disgusting body smell. On high elevations Tibetans almost never clean themselves (although they adopt more agreeable habits when they travel in India); our two were half-ripe, so to speak: cleanliness was

giving place to filth and the two smells blended sickeningly. One way and another my senses were all nervously alert.

I could hear the driven snowflakes spattering against the tight-blown canvas and felt, with my hand, the drift creep swiftly up the tent-side, until the rocks that held it down were buried. The wind shrieked as if all Tibet's hosts of devils had been loosed to wreak havoc in the Zogi-la, blast following blast, with short, ominous lulls when it sounded as if an army, wheeled transport and all, were struggling through the snow.

In one of those brief moments when the wind drew breath and the frozen snow fell downward instead of driving nearly parallel with the ground, I thought I heard a man's voice shouting. I tried to peer out of the tent but could see nothing. I could not even see the falling snow. We had put out our lantern because it made the air in that confined space almost unbreathable.

There came another blast of wind that shrieked like a million voices, so, believing I must have been mistaken, I drew in my head; but as I fumbled with the lacing of the flap I heard the cry repeated. Even then I was not sure it was not imagination, since I knew my nerves were all on edge; I did not care to wake the others, who would probably lose a whole night's sleep if I should set them speculating about a false alarm. I was fully clothed, with my boots on, so I groped for the yak-hair overcoat, pulled on a leather cap with ear-flaps (something like an aviator's) and crawled out under the tent-flap.

For several minutes my senses reeled before the storm. I could not even see the outline of the tent two yards away, although the change in the sound of the wind as it struck the slanted canvas was easily distinguishable. The whole earth seemed to be swaying over an unseen chasm in which chaos yelled and thundered. Then, suddenly, there came another of those awful pauses, and I nearly fell, because I had been leaning against the pressure of the wind. Before I could recover balance, and before the storm burst along the pass again, I heard the cry repeated.

It did not sound like a cry for help; it was more defiant than that, but the note was desperate. I shouted an answer as loud as I could but could hardly hear my own voice; the storm snatched it and hurried it off to nowhere; the men in the tent did not hear it at all. Nevertheless, the cry of a man had reached me through a pair of leather ear-pads, so it must have come from the direction of the pass and I began to try to make my way toward it.

There was nothing to give direction but the wind, but by

keeping that full in my face, so that the sharp snow stung my eyes, I was able to move forward very slowly without much risk of falling into the ravine that, I knew, flanked the road on the left-hand side. I went almost inch by inch, minded to lie down and wait for morning if the shifting wind or my own inexperience of snow should make me lose my sense of direction.

Once or twice I tried shouting again, and stopped to listen, but there was no answer. The snow was already knee-deep, and moderately firm, but drifted into waves that made progress in the dark increasingly difficult. I gave up hope of finding anyone when I had reached where I supposed the entrance of the pass must be. At that point there seemed to be a veritable wall of snow, and I turned, cursing myself for a fool for having ventured out on such a mad quest, wondering how to find the way back. My own tracks were already covered. There was absolutely nothing visible; I could not see my hand before my face. There was just one chance in a thousand that my voice might carry down wind to the tent and waken someone, who would miss me and then show a light, so I began to yell. As I did so, something clutched my right foot.

I can feel the clutch now, when I think of it. It was like the hand of death. In imagination I felt myself falling over the edge of the ravine beside the road. But it was a horse's leg that tripped me, and I fell on the horse's stone-dead body. Groping, I felt a man's arm, and that brought me back to my senses; I pulled him up out of the snow, hugging him close to me to preserve what little life he had. He was a moderately heavy man, with a great weight of frozen snow in his whiskers, but I could not see even his outline. He lay in my arms like a child, and once or twice I thought he tried to speak.

I began to shout again, working my way cautiously toward where I supposed the tent was, trying to judge direction by the feel of the wind behind me and counting footsteps in order to estimate the distance. But once I paused with a foot over the edge of the ravine and only the force of the blizzard saved me from stumbling over; the next thing I did was to crash into the rock wall on the opposite side of the road. I was abreast of the tent, although I thought I had only gone half-way, when Grim heard me shouting at last and I saw the warm glow of our lantern through the snow-white canvas.

The tent nearly blew away when Narayan Singh opened it to pull me in, and it took our united strength to get it closed again and laced up. The wind blew out the lantern and we had to work in the dark, like sailors aloft in an arctic sea.

When we had the tent secured at last, and the lantern lit again, it took us half an hour of rubbing, slapping, rolling brandy-dosing and questioning before we could get a word out of the man I had carried in. Then at last he spoke to us in English.

We asked him his name, and he said it was Mordecai.

"Son-in-law of Benjamin of Delhi?"

"Sure!" he said. "You fellers—you know Benjamin? You seen my wife and kids?"

Around a virgin daughter of a king are guardian walls, and ere one cometh at the walls are fierce men. He must therefore be acceptable in all ways who shall enter in. So is it wonderful that God should cause His secrets to be guarded by ferocity, and that of many kinds? Else were it a too simple thing for fearful men to enter in and ravish. Lo, I tell you, there is nothing worth the winning that must not be won; and this also: he who hath the secret hath it by his own worth, and that proved.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRANGE TALE TOLD BY MORDECAI.

His face was hollow and wan from long privation. When Grim and I knew him seven or eight years before he was a stocky sturdy individual, clean shaved, with a face not unlike Lenin's but better humored—nearly always smiling. Now he was a tortured wreck with a straggling black beard that partly concealed his thinness, and as full of fear as he had formerly been full of impudence.

It was a long time before he remembered me, and longer yet before he knew Grim. He was in terror of our two Tibetans, whom we kept away from him as far as possible, but there was only room for us all to sit chin by jowl with our heads exactly underneath the ridgepole. Nothing could persuade Mordecai to talk until we sent Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong outside to dig themselves into the snow beside the ponies. Even so, he feared Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose—nagged them with insolent questions and tested their knowledge of Benjamin—before he consented at last to tell his story.

"Rait?" he said. "Yes, curse him! The swine calls himself Lung-tok. You listen. The Tibetans know a white man got through, and they're after him, searching all the inns and stripping travelers—strip a man naked and scratch him to see if the skin's white under the dirt. I was all right; I'd a letter for the Kün Dün.* I delivered it. He treated me first class, same as he does everyone who can get to him, but he asked who the chiling is who's in Tibet without permission. I didn't let on that I knew. After a bit the Dalai Lama gives it me in writing to go anywhere I pleased, me wanting to trade—so I told him. Gimme some more o' that brandy."

We gave him food instead, and then a cigarette, which he

*The Dalai Lama.

smoked to the end. When he resumed his tale his voice had lost some of its hoarseness.

"Lung-tok, Rait calls himself. That's my name. The letter the Dalai Lama gives me's made out to Lung-tok. I've used that name in Tibet since the first time Benjamin sent me up there. Rait learned all about me in Simla, where I'm answering his questions and a Tibetan comes up and calls me Lung-tok. I didn't see no harm in telling him, not knowing yet that he was making plans to go to Lhassa, though I should have seen through it—him asking more questions than a Hindu lawyer, most of 'em about a place called Sham-bha-la. I got wise to him after a bit; and I'm as keen as what he is to find Sham-bha-la. Me, I goes to Benjamin and talks him into sending me to Lhassa—see?

"So I'm in Lhassa, and business ain't bad. I'd sold all I'd brought with me and put the money out at interest, so's Benjamin 'ud have a credit there to trade against. And talking about the bazaars and one thing and another, I hears of a feller named Lung-tok—which they think it's a coincidence there's two of us of one name and there's some mighty inquisitive questions asked. But I've that letter from the Kün-Dün, which makes me all right; and I says nothing about Rait. Not even if he'd stole my name. I wouldn't put him in bad—not in that country. But me, I'm out to find Sham-bha-la just as keen as he is.

"I ain't got no copyright on the name, you understand. But fifty-fifty. If he's using my name, I've a right to sit in, haven't I? If he's found where Sham-bha-la is, I'm coming. There's old books in that place that 'ud fetch a fortune in New York.

"So I changes my name and lets a beard grow, meaning not to spoil his chances; but I takes along that letter from the Kün-Dün just in case of accident. I can pass for a Tibetan any time, and I takes the name of Shatra; but you never know what'll happen next up in that country, so I makes sure of the alibi by keeping the Kün-Dün's letter in a tube tied to my left arm.

"I found Rait in a monastery. And, same as I'd heard, he was showing 'em how to get gold out of the dirt they bring from Thok Jalung. That stuff's rich. They bring it all the way in baskets. They was losing more than half the gold, the way they roasted it, and even so it was good business; but he was showing 'em how to do it better—kidding 'em he'd learned the trick in China, where he said he'd been sold as a slave when he was two years old, along with his mother. He had the Chinese accent down fine. And another thing I'll give him credit for: he had 'em all believing he was taught in China by

some kind of a living Buddha; he could talk 'em stupid when it came to arguing their own religion.

"Most of 'em had heard of me under the name of Lung-tok, though none of 'em had seen me, me not having visited those parts. So Rait has no trouble in getting away with my name, nor no trouble of any kind, since it's well known I'm O. K. in Lhassa. I knew him first look I had at him, and he knew me. But I couldn't get to talk to him, and though I made him all allowance for the danger we was both in, all the same it struck me he weren't acting right. Mind you, I'm not saying it was him that set 'em all against me. It ain't easy to believe that of a white man. I'm just telling you what happened."

Memory of what happened made him shrink into himself. For a while he appeared to go mad, muttering Tibetan phrases, but Grim could not understand a word he said. It did not need much to make us all feel spooky, with that storm howling outside and the lantern casting shadows on the tent.

"The wrong lodge!" said Chullunder Ghose, and Grim nodded. Narayan Singh swore Sikh oaths through his teeth and reached for the brandy, forcing some of it to Mordecai's mouth to keep him from groveling on the ground sheet with his hands over his eyes. When he sat up again at last he looked like a man recovering from epilepsy—weak, and afraid of the things he had seen in his fit. He began talking in a hurry, as if the sound of his own voice comforted him.

"They're all extremes," he said, gesturing with his head toward the north. "They're whites and blacks, and you can't tell which is which, till something happens. There's white Mahatmas, and black Mahatmas—and a kind of war going on between them behind the scenes. But nobody never sees them Mahatmas—or if he does, he don't let on. If a Tibetan's white—no matter if he don't wash—that don't mean nothing—that's climate and a bit o' superstition—you can trust him if he's white. And if he's black, you can't. The blacks are known as Red Hats, but that's only the name outsiders call 'em by. You can't tell which is which; there's blacks and whites all in one monastery.——Say, are you going through the pass?" he asked suddenly.

I told him yes. He flew at once into a panic.

"You can't! You're mad! Turn back, I tell you! If they'd skin you, that 'ud be a mild thing! They hunted me over the passes to Leh—and I give 'em the slip there—thought I had. They found me, damn 'em, but I got a horse. I'd no money left—only some bread in my pocket. I rode like hell all over the Dras plateau and the horse dying under me mile after

mile, me keeping life in both of us by cursing Rait! Snow was coming, but I see if I could make the Zogi-la first, snow 'ud save me, like a door shut in their faces. And I made it! Krishna! *Ach ihr liebe Gottes Menschen!* Yoi-eh-h-h! Listen to me! Through the Zogi-la I come—at midnight—and the storm behind me! Then the horse died. How long ago was that? Where am I, anyhow? Gimme some brandy."

His mind wandered again. He relapsed into gibbering madness, leaning his back against my knees, his eyes staring into vacancy, his hands warding off imaginary specters. Chullunder Ghose seized his hands and slapped the back of them. Narayan Singh covered him with an extra overcoat. Grim forced brandy between his lips; and after a while the brandy brought him around.

"What was I telling you? Rait? He's rotten! I've seen 'em flog men—and women too, till they looked like great worms writhing in purple mud—and that's too good for Rait! Mind you, I don't say, even now, he did it. We'll talk, though, him and me—alone somewheres—if I have to find Sham-bha-la first! Damn his eyes, he maybe thought I'd tip off the Tibetans he was white. He ain't white! Me and Rait has a talk-fest coming. You think what you like about it. If I prove it on him——

"The monks was all friendly to me, and they're hospitable. I'm put to share a cell with one of 'em, and he's a lazy, good-for-nothing sort of bum that 'ud rather talk all night and eat all day than read his books. He's not much good at reading anyhow, but he's good natured, so I figures I'll do myself a turn by showing him the Kün-Dün's letter, me holding my thumb over where it says my name is Lung-tok. After that I asks him about Sham-bha-la, and he says it isn't a place at all, but a kind of state of consciousness like getting drunk—only drinking's vicious, whereas Sham-bha-la isn't. He laughs then about Rait—Lung-tok he calls him—wanting to get to Sham-bha-la, and we has a drink together which is against the rules, him humming a song about chang and pretty ladies. Chang is the kind of beer they drink. It's potent, some of it."

There came a more than usually violent gust of wind that seemed to shake the earth. It screamed among the rocks and Mordecai shuddered with terror.

"That's them! That's them! I heard 'em! I tell you, they wasn't a mile behind me! They'll have fought their way through, same as I did! Give me a gun, somebody"

We could not quiet him until Narayan Singh crawled out and pretended to scout through the storm. When he came back with ice on his beard he reported that dawn was

breaking but the storm was growing worse. We put the lantern out to save oil, but then it was almost pitch dark in the tent and Mordecai, laughing hysterically at his own fear, urged us to light it again.

"They got caught in the drifts!" he said. "Let's hope! There's a place where the wind comes three ways, freezing cold, and nearly blows you off your horse. That's where the pass turns sharp to your left, and on your right——" He shuddered again. "What was I saying? Oh yes, me and the monk. He must have told about that letter from the Kün-Dün, which was what I hoped he'd do. Just to prevent accidents I wanted 'em all to know I stood O. K., without having to show my credentials, which might have made it bad for Rait. You see, I could prove my name was Lung-tok, and he couldn't, and if they'd once begun to suspect him he'd have been up against it.

"They was more friendly to me than ever when it got known. I had that letter from Kün-Dün—that's the 'Presence'—what they call the Dalai Lama. Some of 'em asked to see it, but I only showed the tube what it was in. And somebody told Rait. I'll give him credit for being smart! He guessed it was made out to the name of Lung-tok. And not long after that there was some Tantric ceremonies. Ever heard of 'em? Black stuff."

He shuddered again. The Jews have always been inquisitive of evil; more than any other people in the world they are shocked by it, and turn against it with loathing and violence when reaction sets in. According to Grim's theory, that is the secret of the strength of their enduring race. It was surely the secret of Mordecai's goings and comings, his strength and his weakness, his courage and his contradictory fears.

"Rait knows enough about the Tantric mysteries to get himself admitted. Maybe he thinks through them he'll find the clue to Sham-bha-la—same as you have to die to learn what the next world's like. Maybe not—I don't know. It was him that put 'em up to inviting me. He slips a note to me one night when we files out of the refectory after supper, two by two, him pretending to twist his ankle on a broken flagstone, so I'd pass him. 'I'll get you a pass to the show,' was all he wrote in it; and me, I'm fool enough to think he's acting white.

"Next day after that they changed my cell mate. I was put in with a monk who had to tell me all the passwords. I'd ought to have seen through it. I'd ought to have noticed that you couldn't lock the cell door. 'Tweren't the monk that stole my letter; he was snoring to beat ten when the door opened,

and in come Rait—tip-toeing—shushing me. 'Quiet!' he whispers in English. 'Have you a message from Jeff Ramsden?'

"Like a fool I says, 'Who's Jeff Ramsden?' He kids he can't hear and stoops over me, groping with his hands.

" 'Didn't Jeff send me a message by you?' he asks, and when I says no, he goes out, silent as a ghost.

"Who stole my letter if he didn't? Sure, I couldn't see him in the dark, but who else in the monastery could speak English, and knew you, and knew you might send him a message? All the same, I didn't miss the letter yet; he'd taken it out of the tube, and the tube was still tied to my arm. He's smart all right. But I'll get him for it. The same feller ain't going to sting me twice.

"Next night was the ceremonies. Cavern. Dark place as old as the mountains. Not above half of the monks is admitted; none but blackbirds is allowed in there—one by one, down dark steps, and along a passage where there was masked monks standing in niches carved out of the rock, who took the password, and each password different. We had to go dead slow because of darkness, and a man in a mask at the entrance holds us up until the man ahead had gone some way along the passage, so there's lots of room between us and I couldn't hear whether my words was the same as other peoples'. Maybe not. I guess not—although I wasn't suspicious until I reached the cavern and two monks in devil masks with horns on 'em led me away from all the others to a sort of platform on the left-hand side.

"There I sits. And I tell you, I ain't feeling good. There was no way out excep' the way we'd come in, and between me and the entrance was about two hundred monks all squatting in rows with hoods over their heads—so I couldn't tell which was Rait. You couldn't see much anyhow. There was about a hundred little butter-lamps, set where the light would shine on a wall all carved with devils and colored something gorgeous—gold, red, blue—it was a wonder.

"Next thing, about a dozen men in masks came up and stood behind me and on either side. You never saw such masks. But queerly enough that took some of the scare out of me. I've been into the secret caves of Lebanon, and into Hindu temples where they marry girls to brass gods; and in all those places, when you first get in they put you through some kind of initiation. I hadn't missed that letter yet, and I was thinking if I flashed the Kün-Dün's seal I'd be all right whatever happened. Down below there on the floor the monks all kep' their heads bowed, so I bowed mine too, but that didn't keep me from looking—three ways at once!

"Presently a bell rings, and there's silence. Door's shut.

Incense—and then what them savages call music—bells, drums, cymbals, trumpets and stringed instruments. I guess it was music. You can't make any sense to it, but it fills a cavern first rate and brings the goose flesh out all over you, deadens your ear-drums, makes you feel like you was dead and wish you wasn't. Then there was chanting. Say, if anything 'ud make a man believe in hell, that chanting would!

"I can't tell all that happened after that. It wouldn't sound right. It was like the music—no way of describing it—rotten bad stuff, worse than anything I'd seen. (And I've seen plenty.) There was just enough of dim-colored light for you to see their heads all swaying, till it looked as if their heads weren't any part of 'em; and after a while you could feel the magic of it, as if your senses all worked backward instead of forward. It felt like being the reflection in a looking-glass. It felt as if we'd all gone back together to the place where animals exist before they're born. Horrible!—and me, I've seen the worst rites in the Hindu temples.

"Suddenly a man showed up from nowhere—black—stark-naked, except he had a devil-mask on. King o' Darkness. They all moaned at him. It was worse and worse. He swayed, and they swayed in time to him, until he had 'em all by the imaginations—and he pretty near got me, but I was hanging on to the multiplication table—thirteen times thirteen—working it out in my head to keep from being caught in that cursed magic. I can stick out most things, but it made you feel your head weren't yours. Nor your soul neither.

"There was lots more. So far they was only warming up. Maybe now I don't remember all of it. After a while I guess it got me. I felt like a man under water, or in a dream or something. There was pressure on top of my head. I couldn't move. Then all at once I come to—sudden—and I knew I was up against it! That King o' Darkness faced my way and hollered, pointing at me with a kind o' pitchfork. And they all hollered.

"I talk Tibetan good, but I couldn't make head or tail of what that King o' Darkness said, nor what they all yelled back at him, excep' that they was meaning me.

"He kep' on making stabs toward me. Then he was gone—sudden, like a shadow when you blow a candle out. No knowing where he went, nor how. Silence then, and you could hear it with your backbone. There weren't no noise, nor nothing a man was used to. All like being dead—lonely—nowhere to go, and no reason for anything. Awful. I guess a cow feels that way in the shambles.

"Then a man in a mask and a long black robe stood up and says—calm as if it bored him—there's a chiling in the

place. The minute he'd said it the band blared up and there was noise enough to burst your head. Them guys who was around me on the platform jerked me to my feet. They tore the clothes off me, along with that tube I had tied to my arm. I was stark naked—and them tearing my things to bits to hunt for something hidden in the seams.

"The rest of 'em howled like maniacs. Like wolves they was. I knew they'd tear me in a minute. So I shouts for Lung-tok. I says Lung-tok knows me.

"I've been laughed at—all Jews have—but never like that before. It made your blood run cold. There weren't so much as a sign from Rait, and I couldn't tell which was him on account of their all having hoods. But I thinks, maybe he's biding his time to help me sudden-like when it'll do most good.

"So I tells them I has a letter from the Kün-Dün—that's the Dalai Lama. But the feller who'd tore the tube off my arm shows 'em the tube empty—and it struck me sudden, all of a heap, who'd swiped it.

"Mind you, I can't prove nothing. I'm not saying it was Rait. But if it wasn't him, who else was it? And if it wasn't him, why didn't he speak a word for me or lift a finger? I called out to him again, and the whole lot mocked me—'Lung-tok! Lung-tok!'—like a lot o' bull-frogs croaking.

"I didn't have time to do no thinking after that. They pitched me off the platform, same as you'd throw meat to tigers, and I don't hardly know what happened, barring I was nearly torn to bits. I'm black and blue now, and that was best part of a month ago—I've lost count o' the days. I fought a bit, until they near beat my brains out, and then I tried to sham dead, but it weren't no use; they beat me until they thought I was sure dead—and me, I thinks the same—and I was chucked into a dark hole.

"When I come to I was lying legs upward in the hole, so cold I thought first I was frozen. It hurt that bad to move, I guess I fainted. When I came to again I was thirsty; I was that thirsty I had to move however bad it hurt. I gropes, and there's bones. I takes one with me. I has to crawl out o' the hole legs first.

"By and by I'm in the cavern. There's seven butter-lamps burning in front o' the carved wall, and I looks. It's a man's thigh bone in my hand. The lamps have been refilled, so there's no guessing what time it is nor how long I've been in that sepulcher. No water. Nobody around. I drinks some of the butter from the lamps, and rubs the rest all over me, leaving only one lamp burning.

"Ever drink hot butter when you're parched? Hoi-yee! I

near went crazy! What I'd rubbed on warmed me and I didn't hurt so much, but my head bursts every step I take. I looks for that passage we'd all come in by, and I was that out o' my senses I was trying to remember all the passwords—me, what couldn't speak—stark naked—blood and butter—wanting to give passwords!

"The door was shut, but it opens easy. There's a monk in the first niche in the passage. There's a lamp, and he's sitting there telling his beads. I walks rights up to him, and he's so scared he can't yell. I guess I was a picture! He grabs me, but I'm greased good—and he hurt me that bad where he gripped, I'd ha' killed my mother! I swats him with the thigh bone. But I weren't so sure his skull was broke, so I takes his staff, what had an iron spike to it, and prods him. Then I takes his clothes. I'm wearing what's left of 'em now.

"I made it quick. There was a storm outside, and that helps. I ate snow. By-and-by I finds some water in a horse trough near the stables. I guess I drunk enough to swim in. Then I was able to think. There was lots o' monastery servants saw me, but they couldn't see me good, 'cause it was snowing, and I'm dressed like a monk, so nobody says a word. I took a horse out o' the stables. And I knew where they kept the loaves of bread all stacked in a shed outside the kitchen. I had to break the lock, but that was easy. So I had bread.

"I reckoned it wouldn't be long before they'd find that monk; unless he was there for punishment they wouldn't leave him more than four hours, and it might be two. I makes the horse step lively, and the snow coming from behind me covers up the tracks.

"But I had to sleep, you understand, and I had to feed me and the horse after the bread give out. And I'd no money. So I acts the monk at wayside inns, begging and blessing the *nemo*—that's the landlady—and telling her she'll have children. Anyone could see I'd been beaten half-dead and was running, but the monks are always having fights among themselves and that's nobody's business.

"Storms—you never see the like of 'em—wind blowing the snow along in clouds, and the tracks covered as soon as a horse makes 'em. But they're after me. I'm fired at. One night they come on me when I'm sleeping in an inn, but I'd blessed that *nemo* special. I slips out while they're beating her to get the information, and she's yelling so they can't hear me lock the door on them. I sets a log against it. Then I takes a change o' horses, leaving my old tired one. I'd ha' cut the throats of all the horses excep' the one I took, but if I'd wasted time looking for a knife I might ha' lost out.

"The worst part was to find the way. The snow don't lie deep on the plains, but it hides the trail and it chokes the passes. If you don't find the right gap, and have your luck with you at that, you're done for. My bruises pained me so I felt like quitting, but I've a wife and daughters—and I was cursing Rait, and that kept life in me.

"I'd have lost the way sure, only I got thinking again after a bit and let them show me. I reckoned they'd know I was making for Ladakh, and they'd keep on going until they caught up. I hid beside the road and let them go by—eight of 'em, armed with rifles. Then I followed.

"Nobody looked to see me come along behind. But of course they was first at the inns, so I had to be smart with the *nemos;* they'd been warned to keep a lookout. I tells 'em I'm the monk the chiling half-killed and I'm racing to keep my brother monks from committing the sin of retribution—which is the way they talk and don't act. The *nemos* understand all right, and one of 'em gives me a nice long knife. I promises her two sets o' twins in three years.

"It's all talk that them passes can't be crossed in winter. A Chink army did it. So did a Sikh army—but they lost out and two-thirds of 'em died. Sven Hedin did it. Me, I've done it. But you have to *kale pe a,* as the Tibetans say—go slowly. You need guts. Them Tibetans what was hunting me left first-class tracks for me to follow, and in one place I come on a load of barley they'd cached, so me and the horse fed good. But I had to keep my eyes open, knowing they'd give up looking for me sooner or later and turn back.

"That come near doing for me. I never thought there'd be more of 'em coming along behind. First I knew, I was fired at. Then they'd shot the horse, and you can hear a rifle miles away. Back come the men I'm following—slow, because it's all a horse can do to climb, but coming; and them behind me coming fast. I'm three parts dead anyhow, so I took a chance."

Mordecai covered his eyes with his hands. Unable to shut out the mental picture of that chance he took, he gestured as if thrusting it away from him and then went on talking rapidly.

"There was a precipice to one side—sheet ice, most of it. Over I goes. Thinking of it's worse than doing it. I'd took the bag of barley with me, so I falls softer sometimes than others. And I sticks the knife into the ice. That helps.

"There's a ledge, and it ain't much, but I lies there and they can't see me. I chucks the bag over. The barley's all spilled and the bag's busted, so it falls all spraddled out and maybe it looks like me from way up top there. They rides

around to come at me from down below—and that's a half-day's journey.

"Climbing back was worse. But there was that dead horse, and I was starving hungry. I gets up there after a while, and there weren't much of the knife left, me using it to dig holes in the ice and hang on, but I cuts off chunks of meat and eats a lot of it. I guessed they'd started home again; they'd reckon I was stone dead on the ledge, not finding me below there; so by-and-by, of course, they'd see the horse I'd cut the meat from, and I couldn't help leaving a track in the snow.

"I lost the way, and it stormed, covering up my tracks and theirs, too. That looks like the end of it. I'm weak and I'm getting light-headed now. I keep talking to my wife, and there's a dish of hot curry in front of me just out o' reach—me hurrying to catch it—reaching out and falling. When I'm pretty near ready to quit, I hear wolves. Then I sees 'em. They're down yonder, fighting over a dead horse—so that's the trail, and the Tibetans are along ahead of me again. That horse's leg was broke, and his insides was still warm, so they ain't so far ahead.

"Them wolves slunk off when they see me coming, so I cuts as much meat as I can carry and makes Leh on foot, digging into the snow at night and following their tracks all day long—me in a hurry to get some good grub and a bed to lie in. You get sick of raw horse.

"It didn't storm no more, so following was middling easy, except where the wind blew the snow in drifts; so by-and-by I sees Leh—down a valley in the distance. I come pretty near not making it. I lies down and cries like a fool. I has to sleep one more night in the snow, and next morning I can hardly drag myself along.

"There's a Ladakhi in Leh—a Moslem, who's a friend of mine. He takes me in and says nothing, but he brings me all the tales that's going round. I'm sick and he's pretty good for a Moslem; he has three wives 'tend to me, and one of 'em's only a child—fourteen—fifteen—thereabouts. She's jealous of the other two.

"Them Tibetans, what's been hunting me, means wintering in Leh. They don't fancy the road back over the passes. And them not having caught me, the folks at home'll say I bribed 'em. They figure to go back and pick up my bones in the spring.

"But I'm not feeling good and the Ladakhi gets a doctor for me—a Moslem. He's a top-notcher, but inquisitive, and, not being told nothing, he talks. So the Tibetans hear of it.

"Ladakh's British, more or less. There's a British resident,

and a Morovian mission, and astronomers up at the observatory. The Tibetans don't dare do much openly.

"First they tries aconite, sending a woman to bribe that young wife to put the stuff in the soup the doctor orders for me. But my Ladakhi friend, he has suspicions; and I've done him good turns. So has Benjamin. So he feeds me rice, him cooking it, and lets the doctor see the soup. When he beat that young new wife you could have heard her yell a mile off.

"Next they tries to set my friend's house afire. He's hospitable, but there's a limit to anything, you understand. I might have appealed to the British resident (and he ain't a bad sort) but it 'ud have meant answering too many questions, besides never being able to leave Delhi again without being watched. So my friend gives me a horse and some food, and I'm off. I gives him a draft on Benjamin to pay my board and lodging.

"Comes five of the Tibetans after me, reckoning they'll catch me their side of the Zogi-la.

"They pretty near did. That horse weren't up to much, though I gives him all my bread. The storm comes in the nick o' time. It sweeps along behind us, and they daren't no more turn back into it than what I did. I've a notion some of 'em went over the ravine, where the pass turns sharp and the wind comes at you three ways. It was pitch-dark.

"What are you fellers doing here? Say—are you going on into Tibet? Honest? Gimme some more o' that brandy. You—you're going into Tibet? What are y' after?"

"Rait," Grim answered.

Mordecai looked at us curiously one by one. His face gave no indication of his thought.

"Well, you can't start while the storm lasts," he said presently. "How'd you like to lend me some of them good blankets while I get some sleep?"

Men think they work for money or some other momentary need; but they deceive themselves, it being curious to witness how unanimously human beings substitute the shadow for the truth—which truth is, that no other impulse governs us than the necessity of growth. Remember it is not the thing done, but the doing that the gods weigh, and that many have failed to reach their goal who none the less accomplished more than he who, coming to a journey's end, thought that the mere end should justify him.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ZOGI-LA LIVES UP TO ITS REPUTATION.

MORDECAI died in his sleep.

We had proposed to let him sleep and to question him at noon about the place where Rait was; and we had proposed to ourselves to give him Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong with three of our ponies to help him reach India, by that means ridding ourselves of the Tibetans, whom Mordecai would probably have been able to keep out of mischief long enough for us to escape across the border.

However, after we had fed the ponies and cleared out the snow that already half-filled the hollow in which they were picketed, we returned to the tent and Narayan Singh, stooping to wake Mordecai to join in our meal, announced:

"So. Buss.* His tale is finished!"

Narayan Singh's was the only spoken command. I remember what I thought about was old Benjamin's grief when he should somehow learn the news.

That same hour, in silence, we buried Mordecai in a fissure in the rock, wedging heavy stones in after him and building a cairn to keep out beasts of prey.

Then there was nothing for it but to take those two Tibetans with us. And we had to make haste; if another storm should come while we were struggling with the drifts that blocked the Zogi-la it would mean almost certain death. I led the way with the ponies that had the lightest loads, to break the trail, and for a while we made good progress, crushing a track for the others who thoroughly understood their business, treading carefully where we had trampled the snow firm. But the wind became terrific; less than an hour after we started it was blowing powdery drifts into our teeth and kicking up stinging clouds through which it was impos-

*That is all.

sible to see a yard ahead. I clung to the leading pony's tail and urged him forward, at the almost certain risk of being kicked whenever he plunged into a drift and struggled out.

The sides of the gorge were invisible. When I paused to rest the ponies and to let the others overtake me, Narayan Singh, who had been bringing up the rear, reported that the drifts were now so deep behind us that we could not possibly turn back.

I led on again; and there were places where the wind had swept the snow down nearly to the road bed, but there it was all that a pony could do to force himself into the blizzard. They turned their rumps toward it and had to be beaten to face it again.

At last, in one of those wind-swept spaces, not yet midway of the pass, the leading pony planted and refused to stir. Unable to see beyond him into the stinging drift, I clung to his mane and reconnoitered forward very cautiously, expecting to find we were off the track and had come to the edge of a precipice. I stepped on a man who lay frozen between the legs of a dead horse.

He was a Tibetan, with a bandolier containing twenty or thirty cartridges, but though we hunted around for a while we could not find his rifle. (Nor did we see a sign of any of the others who had been hunting Mordecai.) The man had crept under the horse after it fell, to protect himself against the storm, and died where he lay.

That may have been the place where, as Mordecai described, the wind came at you three ways—through gaps, I suppose, in the wall of the gorge; but we could not see the gorge; the blowing, whirling snow made your hand invisible at arm's length. We could not hear each other speak.

We left the Tibetan lying there and I led on again; but now Chullunder Ghose was weakening. I had oiled him well from head to foot before the start to protect him against frostbite, but the weight of his extra clothing told on him and he was mountain sick. Yet he would have been an impossible burden for a pony through the drifts.

Grim told him to cling to a pony's tail and assigned him the place in the column next behind me, which gave me double work to do; for, though he did not complain, he kept falling and I had to turn back to haul him out of drifts from which he had not strength enough to raise himself. It was no use leaving him for the others to rescue; the following pony would stop when it came to him and none could get by without floundering through the drift.

The last third of the eleven miles was much the hardest, for at noon the sun melted the surface and the ponies sank in

everywhere, shoulder-deep. We had to haul and dig them out, and then tried spreading a ground sheet for them, picking it up and laying it down in front again but, setting aside the labor of that, the wind made the attempt ridiculous. When we tried to dig a long trench through the drift, the wind blew snow into it almost faster than we could shovel it out.

Then, about two hours after noon the surface froze and the ponies could hardly get foothold before it broke under their weight. Two snow-leopards winded us and came to watch, making the ponies unmanageable, no doubt realizing we were in extremity and expecting to feast off a pony before nightfall. Vultures arrived, too, and watched us from the ledges, some of them looking gorged as if they had demolished that Tibetan and his horse before following us.

However, I believe the hint the vultures gave us saved our lives by spurring us on to greater effort, although Mordecai's tale was sufficient for me; I was determined not to let that brave Jew beat me in persistence. Besides, I knew the Zogi-la was probably merely child's play to the work before us in the higher passes; the knowledge that what he is doing now is not the most difficult part of his job, encourages a man.

Snow began falling again by the ton, but that made the surface less slippery. Also the wind lessened, which made it easier to breathe and in many ways reduced the odds against us. However, we were still not through the pass, and the ponies were utterly foundered, at sunset; the game little brutes gave up the fight, and three or four of them lay down. So we dug them a hole in the snow, blanketed and fed them, and then dug another deep hole for ourselves, covering it with the ground sheets of the tents. We had no fuel, so we had to eat frozen canned stuff, but the ponies fared well on the barley they had worked so hard to bring.

All that night long the two snow-leopards yowled around us, making sleep impossible, and we had to take turns to sit up in the wind with the rifle or they would have rushed in and killed one of the ponies. We fired frequently, but always missed them. They were more invisible than ghosts, and their system was as ruthless as the climate, keeping man and horse awake and nervous until we should grow too weak to defend ourselves. Our Tibetans were much more afraid of the leopards than we were, probably because they knew more of the habits of the brutes; but superstition added to their fear, and Tsang-Mondrong, used though he was to guiding hunting parties, was the worse of the two.

"They are incarnations of the souls of lamas who forsook the true religion and pursued black arts," he told us with an

air of knowing the exact facts. He even told us the names of the lamas. "And as they robbed and misled men's souls, so now they seek our bodies. If they catch us, we will be as they are—leopards in the next life! If a man should die of a sickness, or be slain by a man, then it is safe to throw his body to the dogs and vultures, who will merely eat it and the soul goes free; but if he is slain by an animal he becomes an animal. And all creatures crave company, which is why those leopards seek to slay us men, hoping to add to the number of leopards."

When morning came with dazzling sunlight on the snow, we found we were within three-quarters of a mile of safety on the uplands of the Dras Plateau, where the snow lies less than a foot deep all winter long because of the terrific wind. Three hours' struggle brought us out into the open, and though we were still followed at a distance by the leopards all the vultures flew away.

And now luck turned our way again. In the place where we rested the ponies, to the leeward of a huge rock, we found quantities of yak-dung, which is the almost universal fuel of the country; so we had a hot meal with tea and Chullunder Ghose began to recover his strength.

Our problem now was how to pass through Leh without being discovered by anyone who might warn the authorities. The door to India was shut behind us, and the handful of military police who guard Ladakh and Baltistan were almost certainly in winter quarters; but there was no way of avoiding Leh, which is a scattering village of about three thousand inhabitants, half-hidden in a valley where converging routes from Tibet meet.

From the Zogi-la to Leh the road follows the line of the Dras drainage by easy gradients, turns near the Indus and then leads nearly straight to the town between parallel, yellowish ranges. Night marches are almost impossible, and by daylight it is hopeless to try to escape observation.

Tsang-Mondrong and Tsang-yang were our chief perplexity. They had worked well with the ponies, and we were willing to take them with us into Tibet if there were any reasonable prospect of their not betraying us; but our arrival in Leh would be sure to arouse curiosity, and to expect those two men not to answer questions in a way that would bring us to the notice of the authorities was to expect altogether too much of them.

Grim solved the riddle, although Chullunder Ghose suggested the key. Our fat babu was full of all kinds of fears since the Zogi-la upset his nerve and spurred an always keen imagination.

"Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong will say we killed Mordecai!" he prophesied. "They will furthermore say that we killed that Tibetan whom we came on in the pass. That means winter in prison—and I assure you, there are bugs in Ladakh! And while we languish amid the bugs, those Tibetans who were pursuing Mordecai will poison our food! I vote we camp here for a long time and observe what happens!"

Grim questioned our Tibetans narrowly, to find out what they knew about Mordecai, and, discovering their ignorance of everything except that he had come through the Zogi-la by night and died in our tent, he told them about the monks who had hunted Mordecai out of Tibet and now were wintering in Leh.

The effect was surprising. If it had been possible they would have left us there and have turned back through the Zogi-la to India. They appeared more afraid of those monks than they had been of the leopards in the night, and each in turn put Grim through a course of questioning to find out whether they could trust us not to hand them over to the monks.

"Jimgrim, they will not believe the Jew is dead. They will say we met him in the pass and helped him on his journey."

"Rot!" Grim answered. "That isn't what you're afraid of. Come on now, tell the truth and perhaps we'll help you."

There was nothing to tell, apparently, except that they were scared out of their wits, they themselves being ex-monks who knew the rigors of monastic discipline. They assured us they were not at all afraid of any Tibetan government officials we might meet:

"But monks—that is different. They govern themselves. Some monks are fiercer than others."

"Why are you afraid of these monks in particular?"

They refused to say. But there was no doubt of the fear; their eyes betrayed it. They begged us to pretend they were our Hindu servants—anything rather than admit they were Tibetans or had ever been in Tibet.

They simply would not hear of being left in Leh.

"Those monks would murder us!"

They promised service, secrecy, fidelity to death if we would only take them along with us and help them to avoid the men who had been hunting Mordecai; but at the end of an hour's talk we were as much in the dark as ever as to why they should fear that particular party and yet not be afraid to enter Tibet with us. They would not even say which monastery they supposed the monks were from.

However, into Leh we had to go; and there we had to stay

at least one night, in order to replenish our stock of barley for the ponies and to add to our own provisions, since the Tibetans meant two extra mouths to feed. The puzzle was, how to find Mordecai's friend without knowing his name and without informing the whole of Leh of our arrival.

We decided to pretend we were a party of merchants on our way home, intending to winter in Leh until the snow should leave the passes in the spring; and Grim, since he could speak Tibetan, went on ahead, alone, to try to find the Ladakhi who had befriended Mordecai. We followed by leisurely stages (if fighting the wind of Ladakh can come under the heading of leisure), so Grim reached Leh a whole day's march ahead of us.

We arrived at nightfall purposely and found him waiting for us beside the road, in the gloom under a clump of twisted tamarisks. There were no greetings, no conversation; almost before we came within hail he mounted his pony and rode slowly ahead, and if we had not recognized the pony we might have doubted he was Grim. Light snow was falling—prelude to a blizzard—and the lights of the Leh houses made the town look like a Christmas card. Except for the rarefied atmosphere and the sensation of being up among the clouds, it might have been a New England village seen through the murk of a wintry night.

Mordecai's friend's house stood near the northern outskirts of Leh, in a hollow between two spurs of a rock-littered mountain. There were a few poplar and willow trees around it that gave it a prosperous, civilized appearance but the house itself looked capable of being held against uncivilized marauders, having very few windows facing outward and they extremely small, with heavy iron bars. There was a tower, too, from which rifle fire could sweep the approaches, but the planted trees suggested there had not been much need in recent years to defend the place against assault. In fact, all Leh looks peaceful.

A narrow gate was opened for us that led into a spacious yard all littered up with yak-dung and the junk accumulations of a lifetime. Along two sides of the yard were sheds, in which we stabled the ponies alongside cows, yaks, goats, and mules.

Our host, Sidiki ben Mahommed, came and introduced himself by the light of a hurricane lantern—a rather undersized, lean, active-looking man with bright brown eyes and a brown beard turning gray. He bulked big in his yak-skin overcoat, with a fur cap down over his ears, but when he took them off inside the house the contrast made him seem even smaller than he was. In our honor (I believe) he put on

spectacles, which gave him an air of the schoolmaster; there was nothing whatever the matter with his eyes, which appraised us critically and without concealment. In turn we all appraised him, and were disappointed. Mordecai's account of him had led us to expect a very different type of man.

The room he had brought us into was a large one, heavily beamed and ceilinged with hewn planks. At one end was a cast-iron stove and at the other a rough stone fireplace big enough to have roasted a sheep whole above the blazing lumps of tamarisk root. Along the whole of one side, about eight feet above the floor, there ran a gallery whose railing was concealed by costly rugs. Sidiki ben Mahommed clearly was a man of substance.

There was a phonograph with an enormous rack of records, and an old-fashioned upright piano which must have cost him a fortune to bring all the way from India. Most of the rest of the furniture looked as if it might have been bought at a sale of some dead Englishman's effects; there was a cushioned lounge, for instance, set before the fireplace, big enough to seat four people comfortably. Costly rugs were spread, in places two, and even three deep, on the rough-hewn floor. The only things in bad taste in the room were two chromographs—one of Queen Victoria with an absurd crown that made one wonder how she balanced it, and the other of Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar with a cast in his eye and a saber about twice too big for him.

"There is something in me of Lord Roberts—something in me of Queen Victoria," he remarked. "For the one I was an interpreter. From the other I learned dignity, when I saw her at her Jubilee in London."

He treated our Tibetans with contempt, motioning them toward a mat near the cast-iron stove, on which they went and sat obediently. Not much was said by anyone until two servants in extremely dirty clothes had brought in quantities of curried sheep and an enormous kettle of tea, stewed with butter and salt over a yak-dung fire, which gave it an allegedly exquisite flavor. Our party, including our host, ate at a long table in mid-room, seated on benches, but our Tibetans were served over in the corner by themselves, and when the meal was finished, one of the servants led them outside to a room across the yard. They went without remonstrance, looking rather sheepish and ashamed.

Then we sat down in front of the fire, a little conscious of being watched by women from between the rugs that hung from the gallery railing, our host laughing as he told how Grim had found him.

"Ah, subtlety! How I do love subtlety!" he exclaimed,

rubbing his hands together. "I have made my own fortune by subtlety. This Mister Jimgrim says he had no plan at all until he reached Leh. He did not even know my name. So what did he do but look for the Tibetans who had been hunting Mordecai. They have made their winter quarters in a little monastery near here and were easy to find. He went to them just after sunset, with his face covered, saying his name is Tsang-Mondrong and himself a spy in the pay of the Lhassa Government. Hee-hee! They invited him into the monastery but he told them he must first learn who has sheltered the chiling Rait. Understand, these people think that Mordecai and Rait were one and the same person. So they directed him to my house and told him he should murder me. To that he said 'no,' he must first uncover a plot by certain other chilings to enter Tibet in the spring, and if I should be murdered there would be no way of uncovering the plot; he suggested it might be better for him to approach me and pretend friendship, possibly even obtaining lodging at my house in order to spy on me. They believed him! Can you imagine that? Furthermore, he made them promise not to interfere with me or with himself. A man who can do that could make a woman reasonable!"

"Easy," said Grim. "There's a colony of Ladakhi Moslems in Lhassa. I told them that among those you have influential friends who have the ear of the Dalai Lama. That scared them. The Dalai Lama doesn't stand for the kind of game they're playing. Besides, they're lazy. They don't know Mordecai is dead, or that their own party got caught and frozen in the Zogi-la. They've lost enthusiasm and they're having a nice easy time. They were tickled to bits to have me take the business off their hands."

Sidiki ben Mahommed nodded. "There will be bastards in Leh a year from now," he prophesied, seeming to take malicious satisfaction in the thought.

He was rather a mean little man, whose chief determination seemed to be to make a handsome profit for himself whatever else might happen. He was at some pains to explain to us that Mordecai had paid him well. Altruism was an abstraction that he regarded with respect, perhaps, but from a most respectful distance.

Narayan Singh asked him gruffly, "Will you help us into Tibet? Do you suppose you can?"

"I have known quite a number of men who have entered Tibet," he answered, "many more than you imagine. You have only heard of the explorers, some of whom returned and wrote books. I have never written books, but I am sixty years old, and I have seen, or know of, nearly a hundred

Europeans who have found their way in. Very few returned. Most of them were looking for Sham-bha-la. Half a dozen may have found it but I think all the others perished. The bones of some are very likely in that hole under the cavern into which they threw Mordecai after they thought they had killed him.

"You see this furniture? I bought it from an Englishman in Srinagar, who threw up his pension and everything and set out in search of Sham-bha-la. I helped him to enter Tibet but I never heard of him again.

"I, myself, searched for Sham-bha-la for eleven years. I am perhaps a little wiser than I was, but it may be I am only lazy and afraid. At any rate, it seems to me a waste of energy to try to learn what is beyond my understanding. I don't even understand my own religion. How shall I understand that of individuals whose thinking is said to comprehend all religions and philosophies and all the problems of the human race?

"You believe that such people exist, or you would hardly risk your lives to look for them in Tibet. I assure you, I know they exist; but I also assure you that you will seriously risk your lives if you set out to find them. I am sure that Sham-bha-la exists, but I have no notion where. However, you are not the kind of men who will desist because of anything that I say. How much will you pay me if I help you?"

"Nothing," said Grim—so downrightly that Sidiki ben Mahommed blinked.

Presently Narayan Singh broke silence:

"Are you blind that you could not find Sham-bha-la, though you say you searched eleven years? Or is the place a lie?" he asked.

"I know a man who knows exactly where it is," Sidiki ben Mahommed answered. "I could introduce you to him, but if he knew I had demanded money from you he would have nothing to do with you or me. He is in Leh. I spoke this afternoon with him. He has said he will visit my house to-night. But he will take care to appear to you to be a very ordinary person if you should let him suppose I had offered to sell you his services. I am sorry I made that suggestion. I should have served you first and then have trusted to your generosity."

"Is he the man you mentioned to me as 'the Chela'?" Grim asked.

Sidiki ben Mahommed nodded.

"Good!" exclaimed Nayaran Singh. "Let him come. I wil

soon tell you whether he lies or not. There are chelas—and then again chelas."

For fifteen minutes after that we sat still, watching the tree roots crackling on the hearth while from the gallery above us came the hardly audible whispering of women and the occasional loud creaking of a board as someone moved.

Somewhere up there in the gallery was the "new, young wife" who, according to Mordecai's story, had been beaten until you could hear her yell a mile away, for having tried to poison him.

Silence! And above all, silence! Only the irresolute and crafty need to publish their alleged intentions; and the wise not so. For a friend, if he in truth be such, will give you credit for a proper motive and an honorable aim, assisting how he may when he perceives his opportunity. Yet few know who their friends are; and a false friend is a devil in disguise. Not many devils have the courage to come openly, but this is certain: they are devils, and if they know what you intend they will prevent you.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER NINE

LHATEN

SUDDENLY and almost silently there came into the room a man of middle stature, who had nothing much remarkable about him at the first glance except that he seemed personally clean—a rare thing in those altitudes. (Our host, for instance, did not look as if he had washed himself for at least a week or two.)

The visitor stood before us in a plain clean smock of dark-yellow homespun, baggy linen trousers and felt slippers. The opening of his smock and the edges of the sleeves were trimmed with beads, but he wore no other ornament, except a gold ring, intricately carved, that covered a whole joint of the middle finger of his right hand.

Our host introduced him by the Tibetan name of Lhaten, but he did not look like a Tibetan, for one reason because his eyes were bright blue. He had carefully combed black hair falling nearly to his shoulders, a high forehead, a straight nose, and a smile that suggested that to him, life was a rather comic sort of tragedy. He seemed to exude vitality, and he had the manners of a well-bred cosmopolitan.

He came and stood in front of each of us in turn, his eyes lighting with humor as our host announced our real names. When I shook his hand his skin felt soft in contrast to mine, but the muscles were firm underneath it, and he seemed to have plenty of physical strength.

He spoke English with a pause between each word, as if he had lost a former fluency, but there was not much accent. He made no mistakes of grammar. His voice was quiet, deep—manly.

"I was sent for," he said. "I must go soon. What can I do for you?"

He sat in the seat next to Grim, studying Chullunder

Ghose, who bulked between him and the firelight: but he looked away when he saw the babu was growing nervous.

"Tell these sahibs how to find Sham-bha-la!" said Sidiki ben Mahommed, in a voice like a schoolmaster's showing off his favorite pupil.

Lhaten leaned back in his chair and laughed; but whereas laughter in the East is usually scornful, his was not; it was friendly. He looked at Chullunder Ghose again for a moment, and then at each of us, and said:

"Some have done it. It is not for me to say you can't. A number of people have found that place in the course of centuries. . . . Why do you wish to find it?" he asked.

None answered and he looked at us again.

"The hardest part is not the difficulties," he remarked. "What route have you?"

"Benjamin's," said Grim.

"None better to begin with. But you go in winter? Why?"

Grim told him about Rait and Rait's letter to me. I showed him the letter. He frowned as he read it.

"That man failed before he started," he remarked.

Grim made as if to say something, but changed his mind. Narayan Singh spoke up:

"Where is the place?"

Lhaten looked straight into the Sikh's eyes for a moment and then answered slowly:

"Whoever knows will never tell. I think you understand that. Why, then, did you ask?"

"To test you," said the Sikh. Then, leisurely, he got up from the door and stretched himself. "You are no liar. Can you fight?" he asked.

But Lhaten only smiled and watched him.

"I fight well with any weapon. I shall *make* you show me where the place is," said Narayan Singh, his eyes blazing as if he had gone mad. Our host began to show signs of panic. I tried to catch Grim's eye, but he would not look at me.

"I prefer not to argue," said Lhaten. "If I know or can do anything there is no need to talk of it."

"Sit down!" commanded Grim abruptly and Narayan Singh obeyed.

"Very good indeed," remarked Lhaten, but it was not clear whether he referred to Grim or to the Sikh.

"You asked, what can you do for us," said Grim.

"Why not tell me?" he answered. He appeared to like Grim.

"Help us to get there."

"I may not."

"You shall!" said the Sikh, and was on his feet again, arms folded.

Lhaten studied Narayan Singh thoughtfully for thirty seconds.

"I could ask for permission," he said. "But to enter requires strength. You show a weakness."

Narayan Singh sat down as if his knees had slackened under him. Chullunder Ghose chuckled; it pleased him to see the Sikh have the worst of an encounter. Lhaten glanced at the babu.

"Is ridicule strength?" he inquired. "That honorable man" (he indicated Narayan Singh, who was glaring sullenly) "has courage. I bow to it."

"And me you mock?" the babu asked. He began nervously throwing a handkerchief from hand to hand, but his grin was challenging.

"No," said Lhaten, "but I think you will not see what you go for. These two sahibs from the West may win through—possibly—perhaps—I don't know. I will ask permission and if that is granted there will be help. But many were helped and have turned back—more have failed utterly though they have been helped." He looked at Grim. "That one, I think, may succeed." He looked at me. "Friendship," he said, "has saved many a man from failure. May I caution all of you?"

Grim nodded.

"Be silent! Whoever asks, don't tell him your objective. If you do, an enemy will hear of it. Even so, as it is——"

He looked sharply at Sidiki ben Mahommed.

"Do you know Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong?" Grim asked him.

"I have spoken with them outside in the shed," said Lhaten. "No matter what they may have told you, they are ex-monks who belonged to a secret order from which they were expelled. They are following you, instead of murdering or betraying you, because they believe you are following another man who——"

"Rait?" Grim interrupted.

Lhaten nodded. He appeared to dislike naming names.

"——a man to whom they once sold some of the secrets of the order to which they formerly belonged. Those two are superstitious, which makes them doubly dangerous, but at the same time doubly foolish. They think that when they die they will be reborn into animals unless they kill the man to whom they sold forbidden knowledge. They also hope that, having killed the man, they may be readmitted to the order from which they were long ago expelled. Beware of their superstri-

tion. They are as likely as not to kill you when its frenzy seizes them."

"There are slippery places on the way to Tibet!" said Chullunder Ghose.

"Beware you, then, of a false step!" Lhaten answered. "Do you think that with blood on your hands you can——?"

For thirty seconds he observed the babu keenly.

"You spoke of enemies," said Grim.

Lhaten nodded. "The place," he said, "to which you wish to go is hard to find. Thousands wish to enter it, who have no right, and some of those are as jealous as night is of day. They will try to decoy you. If traps fail, they will try to kill you. If that fails, they will try to follow in with you. But in their company you can neither find the way nor enter, because those who keep the place know it would be safer to bring matches into a magazine than to open the door to those destroyers."

It was dark talk—cryptograms to me. I grew impatient with it.

"Look here," I said, "we want to reach——"

He stopped me. "Don't speak the name! Don't mention them who live there!"

He seemed, not exactly afraid to hear the word Sham-bhala spoken, but to treat it as if it were dynamite for use only with precautions. And as if to prevent my mentioning the word he left his chair abruptly and began bidding us good-by. Sidiki ben Mahommed showed him more respect than Moslems usually do to men of alien faith; he made almost an obeisance, which Lhaten treated scornfully, appearing to have a manly dislike for such foolishness. He left the room before we could say another word to him and our host did not follow him to the door, but sat down looking snubbed and discontented.

"He has brought me ill-luck! He has disapproved of me. Confound him!" he grumbled. "May his shadow dwindle until it ceases! How I do hate men who give themselves such airs!"

But it seemed to me that Lhaten had given himself no airs whatever and had very adroitly avoided quarreling with our pugnacious Sikh.

Be sure of this: if you have courage it shall certainly be tested; because in all this universe no quality lies latent forever, but the undeveloped is discarded back into the melting-pot, and that which is ready to put to use; therefore he who has true courage welcomes trial, neither because of bravado nor from any other form of vanity, but because he is strong and the strength asserts itself as sap in springtime.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER TEN

THE MAN WITHOUT A NAME.

It was remarkable that our host seemed more insignificant than ever after Lhaten left the room; by contrast he had become uninteresting, colorless—a little man with overlarge opinions. It was difficult not to betray the change in our attitude toward him. We all felt it.

For an hour we tried to get from him an account of Lhaten—who and what he might be—where he had his education—how he had learned English. We might as well have questioned a four-year-old child. His self-assurance and vocabulary all seemed to have vanished. He broke into the native language frequently and, when he did use English, stammered. He explained he really hardly knew Lhaten at all and had merely invited him to come and visit us because he thought we might be interested. That, however, was a long way from explaining why he showed the man such deference, and why he was afraid now he had gone.

He was full of fear, and the fear was half-contagious; Narayan Singh heaped more wood on the fire with a gruff excuse about the draught that made him shudder. In the gallery the women kept up such a whispering that Sidiki ben Mahammed raised his voice and rebuked them irritably. Then presently one of the women screamed as if she had seen a ghost. Another woman leaned over the gallery and shrilled at her husband three or four sentences whose meaning I could not catch. Then silence, and we listened to the wind under the eaves.

The only other noise came from the compound where the cattle and ponies rattled at their chains. It was a quiet night for Ladakh; the wind moaned, but it was not blowing hard as yet; the storm was coming. A bull bellowed in his stall; an ass brayed; then two or three sheep bleated.

"But I have no sheep!"

Sidiki ben Mohammed went into a panic. Grim laid hands on him to keep him from doing himself an injury; he was rushing about the room upsetting things; he tripped over the hearth and nearly fell into the fire.

"Black magic!" Chullunder Ghose remarked and shuddered.

Sidiki ben Mahommed turned and swore at him, struggling to wrench himself free from Grim.

"First Mordecai—now you! What next?" he screamed. "I tell you, those are not my sheep. I have none!"

"Let's go and look," Grim suggested.

Narayan Singh strode over to the door and stood there listening. I followed him and the floor-boards creaked under my weight, so I did not hear what he did, although I could see by his expression that he had caught some unexplained sound.

"Your guns!" our host yelled. "Get your guns! That bleating outside is a signal!"

Grim let go of him and he began shouting to his wives so loudly and rapidly that we could not hear anything else. Narayan Singh opened the door; he, Grim and I strode out into a dark passage, at the end of which the outer door was rattling in the wind.

"Get your guns, and then to the watch-tower! Hurry!" our host shouted, and pushed past us. We could hear him scrambling up an unseen stairway—and then the women shrilling to him in a panic greater than his own.

We all had automatics, but it took about half a minute to get them loose from the cloth wrappings under our arm-pits. Grim was ready first and tried to find the door bolts, but failed until I struck a match. The draught blew out the match, and that same second came a yell that made our blood run cold. It was probably two yells, simultaneously Grim threw the door wide and we all stepped out, leaving it open behind us. Narayan Singh called back to Chullunder Ghose to bring a lantern, but the babu did not answer.

It was bitter cold and we had no overcoats. There were no stars visible—no moon. The compound was a black pit with the dung stiff-frozen underfoot, and the wind over the wall stung like a whiplash. The cattle were all quiet in the sheds, but there seemed to be something stirring over in the left-hand corner near the shed where our Tibetans had been lodged, though there was no light in the Tibetans' shed. Grim led the way toward the sound.

We stumbled over mixen and the odds and ends of useless rubbish that cluttered the compound, keeping touch with our hands because we could not see one another. Up behind us

on the watch-tower a wooden shutter opened, thunderclapping as the wind slammed it against the masonry; but no light shone through the opening, which would have made a too good target in the dark.

Our Tibetans had vanished. Their shed door was open and the place stark empty except for two wool-stuffed mattresses. I struck a match, but there were no signs of a struggle.

"They have run off to betray us," said Narayan Singh. "There will come policemen and a burra sahib.* Let us escape toward Tibet. Who can catch us if we make haste?"

We agreed on the instant. Grim began to lead the way toward the shed where we had stalled the ponies; he had not gone ten feet when he stumbled over something, but recovered. I fell, close behind him—something under me. I groped. There was blood on my hand—sticky—already half-frozen. Grim struck a match.

Both Tibetans lay murdered, faces upward on the dung. Noses and ears were cut off. There was a knife wound under the heart of each of them. Their clothes had been ripped in a hurried search and there was nothing left that had the slightest value. We struck match after match, until Sidiki ben Mahommed began shooting at us from the watch-tower; then Grim went back to the house in a hurry to stop him, and Narayan Singh and I went to the stable.

Loads and ponies were all where we had left them. We followed Grim into the house, finding our way by a crack of light at the edge of a shutter, then feeling our way along the wall. Grim had gone up to the watchtower and there was no light in the big room, except the hearth blaze that flickered and shone intermittently, making deep long shadows dance in all the corners.

Chullunder Ghose was sitting stock-still where we left him by the hearth, his fat face rigid with fear as if he had been hypnotized. He was staring into a corner and for several seconds we could not make out what he was staring at. Then a root crashed into the ashes on the hearth; a flame and a shower of sparks shot up and we saw what the trouble was.

In the darkest corner, with his back toward a bookcase filled with bound volumes of ancient English illustrated magazines, there sat a coppery-skinned man in a drab-colored turban, whose black hair fell in waves over his shoulders. He had more hair than a woman, but his face was almost tigerishly masculine, eyes large and rather wide apart. He had a silky black beard and mustache that by half-concealment multiplied the fierceness of his lip line. He was

*An important official.

tall, strong-looking, well dressed in a costume that suggested Tibet, and entirely at his ease. He did not move, except to blink occasionally, and as he appeared to have no weapon, I stowed my automatic where I could reach it instantly; but Narayan Singh kept his in his right hand ready for use, making no secret of his mistrust of the man.

"Who's your friend?" I asked, but Chullunder Ghose did not answer. I stirred him with my right toe and repeated: "Who's your friend?"

He came out of a sort of trance. I don't think that until I touched him he had been conscious of our presence in the room.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Sahibs, who is he? Very potent person, I believe!"

I approached the stranger and asked him rather curtly who he was and why he had entered unannounced.

"The door was open," he answered.

His voice was not pleasing, but it suggested strength and the last limit of self-confidence. Insolence was only half-veiled.

"What do you know about those two Tibetans in the yard?" I asked.

"They are dead," he answered.

"Who killed them?" growled Narayan Singh.

"They killed themselves."

"Cut their own noses off?" I asked.

"Whatever has been done to them they did long ago when they set in motion causes that produced results," he answered, smiling at me. He had wonderful white teeth, so perfect as almost to look artificial.

Grim came in, looked at the man once and walked across the room toward him.

"Friend or enemy?" he demanded. "Sharp now with your answer! There's been murder. What's your name and business?"

"Is this your house?' asked the stranger. His voice had steel in it.

"The dead men were my servants," Grim said.

"Worse for you! They who slew may say you did it!"

"What are you here for?" Grim asked.

"To save you."

"From what?"

"From those who sent Lhaten here. Lhaten was here, wasn't he? I came to find what mischief Lhaten had been doing. Before your Tibetan servants died they told their whole story to those who slew them. They, in turn, told it to me. You wish to find Sham-bha-la—is it not so?"

"No," Grim answered. "That hunt's off."

"I think not," said the stranger.

"My friends and I will track these murderers first," said Grim. "Tibet can wait."

"I think not," our visitor repeated.

"Why not?" Narayan Singh demanded, weighing the automatic in the palm of his right hand, dancing it up and down to call attention to it.

"You befriended the man who was known as Lung-tok," the stranger answered. "Your servants told how he died in your tent near Zogi-la. He told you his story; therefore you know too much. Another also called himself Lung-tok, but there is now no falsehood left in that man and it is known his name is Rait."

"What happened to him?" Grim asked.

"He lives, because he said a man named Ramsden is to follow him. One of you is Ramsden. It is said he shall live until Ramsden comes."

"Who says so? You?"

"They in whose hands he is. I offer to save Ramsden from them."

"How? When?"

"When he goes to rescue Rait."

"Why don't you yourself rescue Rait?" I asked.

"I have nothing to do with Rait, or with those who have caught him," he answered. "They are bad men. So are these, who came by Lhaten's wish to slay your servants. They will slay you, if you stay here or if you turn back, because you know too much, you having heard the story of that man who died in your tent in the Zogi-la. You may only go forward, because that way is simplest."

Chullunder Ghose, his face the color of raw liver from the fear he felt, stepped forward between Grim and me, clutching our arms.

"Sahibs! Sahibs!" he said. "There is a British officer in Leh. Appeal to him!"

"If you do that, you cannot save Rait," said the stranger quietly.

"Let Rait die! What does he matter? What proof is there that he is living?" almost screamed Chullunder.

The stranger put his hand into his breast and produced a sheet of paper, folded twice.

"I had this," he said, "from one of those who slew your servants."

He handed the paper to Grim. It was thumbed and dirty, frayed at the corners and greasy with ghee. Grim opened it. Over his shoulder I could see Rait's handwriting:

"Rammy, old top, for God's sake come and rescue me. One of these fellows is friendly and has promised to try to find you. If you receive this, trust the bearer, who will lead you to where I am. Come quickly. They're torturing me. The best way to get me out will be to catch one of their principal men and threaten to kill him unless they exchange. I've begged them to kill me. They refuse, and they won't give me a chance to kill myself. I don't know why. The man who will take this is one of my guards. He will give it to another man, whose name I don't know. Rammy, old top, do hurry! And when you get here use all your brains and muscle—all you have!

"Yours, Elmer Rait."

Our visitor looked calmly at us, smiling.

"Any doubt about Rait's handwriting?" asked Grim.

I produced the letter Rait had written me from Lhassa and we compared the two. There was no doubt.

"All right," said Grim. "We'll start at dawn. We'll take you with us. What's your name?"

Our visitor rose very slowly from his squatting posture. It was as if some unseen hand had raised him by the shoulders; there was no apparent effort, no pause, no haste.

"If you knew my name I might fear you," he said pleasantly. "More likely you would fear me."

He took no notice whatever of Narayan Singh's automatic, but the Sikh snapped in the safety catch and put the thing away. (He said afterward that he had done that of his own volition, but I doubt it. I could feel at the time a terrific impulse to step back away from our visitor and leave him a clear way to the door. Thought was being used as a directing force by one who understood the trick. Chullunder Ghose stepped back and went and squatted by the hearth, muttering some sort of mantra as a charm against unseen influences.)

"You understand we will take you with us."

"I think not," said our visitor and took one step forward, straight toward me.

"Seize him, Rammy!" said Grim.

I think that was the only time I ever regretted having acted swiftly on Grim's suggestion. His brain and my weight and muscle have brought the two of us out of many a tight place. I used every ounce of strength to throw the man off balance and lay his shoulders on the floor before he could bring his own strength into play. I was useless against him—helpless.

I don't know exactly what happened. The sensation was of being hurled back on my heels toward the far end of the

room, as if I had leaned against a spinning fly-wheel. As I recovered balance I heard Grim's voice:

"Don't shoot!"

I had no intention of shooting. Two murdered servants to account for was enough; if this man's hints had any truth in them we were likely enough to be accused of having murdered Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong. But Grim told me afterward he could not help calling out to me not to shoot; he said that at the moment it appeared to be his own will that directed him, but that the words had hardly left his lips before he knew that the suggestion came to him from someone else.

Our visitor walked from the room without haste, closing the door after him, we staring at one another until our silence was broken by Narayan Singh's gruff laugh—nervously asserting recontrol of nerve.

"There, sahibs, you have seen a Mahatma!"

"Rot!" Grim exclaimed, and from beside the hearth Chullunder Ghose piped up:

"Obscene nonsense! Mere Sikh superstition! No Mahatma would consent to be in league with murderers. That was one of the Mahatmas' enemies. That one is black, I tell you—black!—his heart is black! If you should cut it out—"

From over the gallery railing came Sidiki ben Mahommed's voice, harsh with fear:

"Out of my house! You must go now! I will not accommodate you any longer!"

"Can't go in the night," said Grim.

"You shall! You must! My family is all upset. First Mordecai, then you, now that one—it is too much! Go, I tell you!"

"No," said Grim. "Come down and talk to us."

"Unless you go I shall inform against you. I shall say you murdered those Tibetans! Oh, I know about them. One of my servants says they lie without noses or ears on the dung in the yard! Unless you go now I shall——"

"Come down here or I'll go up there and fetch you!" Grim retorted. "You fired at us from the watch-tower."

"Of course I did! Of course I did! You were striking matches! How should I know you weren't burning my sheds?"

"How do we know our men weren't murdered by your order?" Grim retorted. "Come down and talk sense."

He came, although his wives protested, shrilling at him not to go without his rifle. One of them screamed imprecations at me over the gallery, accusing me of having murdered two men in the yard. She only stopped when Sidiki ben Mahommed himself cursed her into silence. He brought the rifle

with him; Narayan Singh kept tipping its muzzle toward the ceiling for fear it might go off by accident.

"You gentlemen, I beg your pardons," he said excitedly. "I am hospitable. I was glad to welcome you. But I cannot stand this. You must go. You must go now. Please!"

"What about those dead men?" Grim asked.

"I bury them! Leave it to me! Oh, do listen to me! Don't be unwise! Do believe I know what I am saying. I know Leh. I know these devils who have done this thing. They wish to get you out of my house. You must go!"

"We shall go in the morning," said Grim.

"Oh, Allah! If you delay they will burn my house. Then they will accuse us all of having murdered those two! They will bring witnesses to prove it! Please go! I pray you to go! Shall I ask on my knees?"

"We need barley," said Grim.

"You shall have it. You may take anything I have. But go now!"

"And we shall be murdered in the dark quite nicely!" said Chullunder Ghose, still trying to control his emotions by the hearth.

It is a mistaken belief that polygamy is vicious; because nothing altogether lacks justification that can teach men by experience how wholesome solitude might be. There are moreover women who have much to learn.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SIDIKI BEN MAHOMMED'S WIFE.

To HAVE gone straight to the British Resident with our story was possibly the proper course. But the greater propriety occurred to us of not leaving two mangled bodies to be buried by Sidiki ben Mahommed, whose nerves were so shattered that he tried to speak three languages at once. We tied up the bodies in gunny bags, loaded them on ponies and took them with us.

We also took Sidiki ben Mahommed. It was snowing, but he knew the trails. He protested, he begged, he swore that his wives and his house were in danger; he threatened to accuse us to the authorities. But we were adamant and I think we saved his life; he should guide us on the first stage of the journey, or we would remain in his house until we could find another guide. That settled it; he was unwilling that we should remain in his house another hour.

We had to reach an almost unknown Lamaistic monastery said to be perched on a crag some fifty miles away and only to be reached by rarely traveled trails. That, Benjamin had told us, was the keyhole to the secret gate of Tibet, and we had the key that fitted it in the form of his letter to the abbot of the monastery; but neither crag nor monastery could be found on any map we had.

It was after midnight when we set out, Sidiki ben Mahommed leading, with Narayan Singh beside him to make sure he did not bolt. We were all mounted, for our host had supplied us with extra ponies in his eagerness to be rid of us. He was in such haste to be off that he could hardly wait for us to pay him for the sacks of barley we drew from his store.

I rode last, being heaviest, to take advantage of the trampled snow, and as I followed the last pack pony through the gate where a cluster of Ladakhi household servants stood

scared and ready to bolt the gate behind me, a woman rushed out from the shadow and seized my bridle rein. One of the servants tried to pull her away but she struck him in the face and spat at him. The darkness there was deepened by the planted trees so I could scarcely see her, but she seemed to be only a girl although she bulked big in a yak-skin cloak with a hood pulled down over her eyes. Before I could guess what she intended she had seized my shoulders and swung up behind me on the pony.

Two of Sidiki's servants tried to drag her off, crying out to me that she was their master's wife. She cursed and struck at them. Then she stuck a knife against my ribs and ordered me in broken Hindustanee to ride on. I seized her wrist and tried to throw her off the pony, but she hung on and swore she would betray us all unless I let her ride.

By that time, what with the wind and snow and Sidiki ben Mahommed's haste, the others were all out of earshot. Five Ladakhi Moslems came out of the yard; one of them seized the pony's head and the others yelled at me while they tried to drag the woman to the ground, she screaming that Sidiki ben Mahommed had promised her she might come with him.

That was a palpable lie, but it suggested a solution of the problem that might serve until I could overtake the others. I declared I had heard Sidiki ben Mahommed make the promise; nobody believed, but one of the servants agreed to follow on foot to see whether it were true or not. The woman tried to prevent that, but I had no time to spare so I started the pony along the track and the servant followed, the others shutting the gate and bolting it.

I proposed to let the woman ride a short distance and then upset her into the snow for the manservant to pick up and lead home again. But we had not ridden more than fifty yards before she began talking, with her arm over my shoulder, raising herself so as to yell against the wind into my ear. Again the broken Hindustanee:

"I have set fire to the house! I hate Sidiki! Unless you obey me I shall say you fired the house because you were accused of having murdered two men! I shall go straight to the British Resident and tell him all about you!"

There was no sign yet of any house on fire, nor anything to do that I could think of, except to hurry forward and consult the others.

But to overtake the others was not easy. I could not make them hear me by shouting against the wind. The snow was deep with only a narrow trodden track between two drifts, and all the pack ponies were in front of me blocking the way; my own pony floundered in the deep snow whenever I

tried to work my way around them. I tried to get the Ladakhi servant to run ahead with a message for Grim, but he refused, saying it was his duty to guard his master's wife.

To have yelled louder or discharged my pistol would have been at the risk of attracting attention from some of the men who had murdered Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong; they were probably night prowling within earshot; our only chance of escaping from them was to get away silently in darkness with the falling snow hiding our tracks.

"Where do you want to go?" I asked the girl, supposing she had a lover and was trying to make use of me to get to him.

"I go with you!" she answered. "If Sidiki sees me, you must kill him!"

That was a nice kettle of fish! Aside from the girl's threat to betray our flight to the authorities, there was the obligation to our host. If his house was burning (I could see no sign of it) or if the police should get on our trail and should overtake us before we could bury those dead Tibetans in a drift—

I could have killed her without much added excuse! And the man who trudged behind was nearly as great a nuisance, since he would be certain to talk, whatever happened. I offered to pay him to take the woman home by force; but she told him, if he did that, she would accuse him of having set fire to the house and would say she had followed to warn her husband of what he had done. He flew into a rage at that and threatened to knife her—drew a knife and flourished it. She promptly claimed my protection!

By that time we were more than a mile from Sidiki's house and, as far as I could judge in the darkness, we were following a trail that led up-hill between two spurs of a mountain. There was not a sign of any other dwelling—no lights—no stars—nothing but darkness and howling wind, with the distance between me and my friends increasing because of the halt for a row with that Ladakhi servant.

I don't know what I should have done if it had not been for the Tibetan ponies, who as usual were full of high spirits because their noses were turned homeward. One of them had kicked Chullunder Ghose off into a snowdrift and gone off at a gallop. I heard the babu bellowing for help, rode forward and pulled him out into the track. I explained the situation. He enjoyed it.

"You might marry her in Tibet!" he suggested.

I threatened to send him back with her unless he could think of something more practical than that, and he stood still, thinking, until his feet grew cold and he began to stamp

them in the snow. Then he came up close and whispered. His was better than no advice at all, so I jumped off the pony, knocked the knife out of the Ladakhi's hand, seized him and held his arms until Chullunder Ghose could tie them behind him. Then I took the woman's knife away and tied her hands too, she cursing me like a cat beset by terriers. I had hardly finished when a flame shot up out of the darkness more than a mile away, and the girl, nearly falling as she struggled to free herself, screamed excitedly:

"Sidiki's house!"

That might have been a signal. Suddenly three men rushed at us out of the darkness. One, a giant, who seemed to be their leader, made for me and I swung my fist straight for his jugular vein; he went headlong in the snow and lay still. The second man went for Chullunder Ghose, and the third for the girl, who appeared to expect him, letting herself fall into his arms. He had his hands full, so I went to the babu's rescue. His antagonist was lunging at him with a long knife and the babu, on his back, was kicking skilfully.

It occurred to me to make that man a prisoner, but he turned on me with a knife. I hit hard, landing with my left over his heart and he went down like a pole-axed bullock, giving way at the knees and falling forward.

The third man had mounted the pony and was trying to pull the woman up behind him, but the pony was giving him trouble. I knocked him down. The pony bolted, following the trail, and that was perfectly satisfactory; there would now be two riderless ponies, whose arrival, crowding themselves into the line, would be sure to bring back Grim and Narayan Singh.

I tried to take that third man prisoner but he slipped away into the darkness. To have fired at him might have brought half the countryside in pursuit of us. Sidiki's house was blazing furiously now, making a splurge of light veiled by the snow—an amazingly beautiful scene, with the shadowy trees in the foreground and here and there a glimpse of men and animals.

I stooped to examine the man I had hit over the heart. He seemed dead, so I began to look for the giant who had attacked me first, and Chullunder Ghose yelled a warning as I peered into the drift where I thought he had gone for good. He had recovered. He came at me suddenly; Chullunder Ghose threw himself down in the way and the giant tripped over him, the babu clinging to his legs. I seized the giant's knife wrist and in a second we were all three down together.

That greasy monster was the strongest man I have ever wrestled with. I weigh two hundred and forty pounds, and

Chullunder Ghose at least as much; he flung us about like threshers clinging to a wounded whale, and though I rained blows at him whenever I could get a hand free they only seemed to increase his violence. He hit as hard as I did. Using both hands with all my might I could not make him let go of the knife. It was all I could do to keep the knife out of my heart and, even so, he cut me badly in a dozen places. He was a first-class fighting man.

To make things worse, the woman got her hands free somehow and began to help him. She jumped on my back and tried to throttle me, her fingernails tearing the skin of my throat. Chullunder Ghose crawled out of the fight and wrenched her off me, throwing her down in the snow and sitting on her.

Then the giant began to have the best of it. My hold on his knife wrist weakened. His dark face, close to mine, leered as he levered me on to my back, my own foot slipping on the crushed snow as I tried to escape from under him. I could not yell to Chullunder Ghose, and he could not see what was happening, for it was black dark down between the drifts. The giant broke my hold on his wrist at last, and though I could not see the knife I knew he was poising it to plunge it into me.

But that second's enjoyment of anticipation cost him his life. There came a thudding of hoofs down wind and a slither as a pony halted, all four feet together. Being half-dead I could hear little and see less, but I could feel the giant collapse on top of me.

"Hurt, sahib?" asked Narayan Singh's voice.

He pulled the dead man off and helped me to my feet, I leaning on him, for I had lost a lot of blood. Then Grim came galloping, and Chullunder Ghose took his weight off the woman to give her a chance to explain herself, but she had no breath left and only sobbed and writhed. With an arm over Grim's shoulder and Narayan Singh's, I managed to gasp out what had happened.

"Where's that Ladakhi servant?" Grim asked.

He went to look for him. The man was lying face downward on the snow, with his throat cut and his hands still tied behind him. Grim went in search of the man I had hit over the heart. He was gone; not a sign of him anywhere.

Then Sidiki ben Mahommed came, riding frantically, our two runaway ponies trailing him. He cried out:

"Oh, my house! My house and all my fortune! Oh you bringers of bad luck—what have you done to me!"

Grim helped him off his pony.

"There's your wife," he said. "Ask her."

Sidiki looked at her and kicked her with enthusiasm.

"Curse the day I ever saw you!" he exclaimed. In that mood he was not much like Queen Victoria and Lord Roberts. He would have kicked his wife to death if Grim had not prevented.

"What next?" Grim asked him.

Neither Grim nor I nor anyone knew what to do. We could hardly leave Sidiki in the case he was, with his house on fire, although from what we could see of the blaze through the snow there was no chance of saving a stick of the place. If we returned we were sure to be charged with arson, murder, robbery; Sidiki ben Mahommed probably would be the first to turn on us. I was bleeding from a dozen knife wounds, weak, growing weaker, and possibly incapable of staying on a pony's back. And if we should go on without Sidiki we would have no guide.

Meanwhile, all the pack ponies had been left in a sheltered place half a mile up the track and were probably rolling on their loads.

"What do you want us to do?" Grim asked.

Sidiki ben Mahommed wrung his hands and stared at him.

"I am ruined!" he said. "I am ruined!"

A solution suddenly occurred to me. I made Grim pull him closer, since I could hardly speak above a whisper.

"How much was your place worth?" I demanded.

He named a sum that was enormous from the point of view of Leh, and I don't doubt he overstated it by half, but it was not much as Americans measure fortunes.

"I will pay you," I said, "by an order on New York, to be cashed by Benjamin of Delhi, if you will guide us as far as that monastery and hold your tongue about us afterward."

"Allah! You will pay? You gentlemen will pay me?" He came out of his hysteria that instant—jumped out of it into the opposite extreme. "There is something in me of Lord Roberts!" he exclaimed. "My wives—the servants rescue them! My house—I build another! Let us go!"

"Not yet," said Grim. He sent Narayan Singh up trail to bring the bodies of Tsang-Mondrong and Tsang-yang. "We'll dump them here beside these other dead ones. It will look like any ordinary hill fight."

Narayan Singh went at a gallop and Grim began bandaging me, using handkerchief, strips from his shirt and the turban Chullunder Ghose wore under his enormous yak-skin cap, washing the wounds with snow to stop the bleeding. Sidiki ben Mahommed dragged his wife to her feet and tried to question her, slapping her face when she refused to an-

swer; he picked up the giant's knife and Grim had to leave off bandaging to prevent his using it.

"Why not kill her? Why not leave her lying here? She tried to poison Mordecai. I don't doubt it was she who burned my house! She has tried it before! She has a lover—a Tibetan! She is an immoral woman! She is an adulteress! She has sold my honor!"

"We will take her along," said Grim. "I'll find a way to make her talk."

The wife (she was not older than sixteen) began to edge away into the darkness but her husband seized her wrist and dragged her back, she screaming at him:

"You daren't kill me! They won't let you! I shall tell all I know about you!"

She began an incoherent stream of accusations in a language that only her husband understood, and kept it up until Narayan Singh came trotting back, with the bodies of Tsang-Mondrong and Tsang-yang on one pony behind him. He dumped the bodies into a snow drift and ripped off the gunny-bag shrouds.

There we left them, Grim and I riding one pony, he holding me on. Sidiki ben Mahommed took his own wife on the extra pony that Narayan Singh had brought, Chullunder Ghose mounting the other, and Narayan Singh brought up the rear on foot.

I remember nothing after that for a long time, except the voices of Sidiki ben Mahommed and his child-wife shrilling at each other, she accusing him and he declaring he would treat her as Abdurrahman of Kabul used to treat faithless women (not particularly mercifully, that is, if accounts are true). I had lost so much blood that finally I fainted into Grim's arms.

It requires more courage and intelligence to be a devil than the folk who take experience at hearsay think. And none, save only he who has destroyed the devil in himself, and that by dint of hard work (for there is no other way) knows what a devil is, and what a devil he himself might be, as also what an army for the devils' use are they who think the devils are delusion.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DUGPAS.

I RECOVERED consciousness inside a monastery. All of us, Sidiki included, were occupying one large cell. The solitary window, facing southward, was unglazed; its wooden shutter stood open to allow smoke to escape from a stone hearth in the middle of the floor; there was no hole overhead—no chimney of any kind. Through the window was a view of snow-clad ranges, and from the cot on which I lay facing the window it looked as if we were suspended in mid-air.

Grim told me we had been there three days and were likely to have to wait another ten before I should be fit to travel. I got off the bed to try my strength and nearly fell. He helped me to the window and I leaned out; there was a sheer drop straight under us of at least a thousand feet and below that again a rocky slope of twice the depth that looked impossible to climb. No eagle had a nest more dizzily inaccessible. I returned to the bed feeling weaker than ever, and there was another lapse of consciousness.

When I came to my senses again there was an old monk in the room; he had a big black bottle in his hand, and by the filthy taste in my mouth I judged he had been dosing me. Sidiki ben Mahommed was leaning over me, saying in the Kashmiri dialect of Ladakh:

"You must save him! You must save him! He owes me money!"

The old monk's face was like polished ivory that had been smeared with lamp smoke—easy-going and good natured but regarding life through little slant eyes as a temporary inconvenience to be tolerated. I was feeling better and he seemed aware of it; he chuckled.

"No talk," he advised, and left the room.

There was a drone of conversation. Grim and Narayan Singh were questioning a woman who was answering pertly,

as if she were not in the least afraid of them but annoyed by their insistence. When I turned my head I could see she was Sidiki ben Mahommed's girl wife, still smothered in yak-skin but with her coat unfastened, showing a smock and Mahommedan trousers underneath. Barring that her face was dirty, she was beautiful—glittering dark-blue eyes and an impudent mouth—well-molded features; her plaited black hair in coils over her shoulders.

"Do you remember that you promised you would pay me money?" asked Sidiki, shaking my shoulder.

Narayan Singh jerked him away and came and stood beside me, followed by Chullunder Ghose, but Grim went on questioning the woman.

"Pay him nothing!" Chullunder Ghose advised. "We have discovered he is helpless anyhow!"

They helped me out of bed and I went to sit beside Grim with my back against an image of Chenresi carved on a stone wall; the image looked extraordinarily like Chullunder Ghose.

"This woman," said Grim (she was squatting exactly in front of me on a pile of sheepskins), "has lied in circles until she is telling the truth at last from sheer exhaustion of imagination. First she said you carried her off. Then she said she was trying to overtake Sidiki to warn him that someone had fired the house. Next she said she herself set the house on fire because the other wives were jealous and treated her badly. Finally, she admitted it was she who tried to burn the place when Mordecai was there, and that it was she who tried to poison Mordecai. Now at last she admits she has a lover, but she won't name him; and she threatens that unless we let her go to her lover she will inform against us all, and particularly against Sidiki ben Mahommed, who, it seems, is in the smuggling business—rifles, ammunition and tobacco."

"A man must live," Sidiki interposed. "How else shall one acquire a fortune in Ladakh? And now I have lost my fortune. She ought to be beaten to death!"

Grim went on talking: "It's known, even in this monastery, that the dugpas have caught Rait. Dugpas is the name for sorcerers who cultivate evil for the sake of evil—that's as close as I can come to understanding it—they're vaguely like the Kali-worshipers of India. The people Rait set out to reach, and whom we want to reach, are the students of Life, so to speak—much in the same way that Luther Burbank studies botany, for the love of it. The dugpas are as much their enemies as the law of gravity is the enemy of the will to rise. Rait had intelligence enough to work his way into the outer fringe of the dugpa mysteries, but that was his limit.

He began to try to use the Dalai Lama's letter that he stole from Mordecai. The Dalai Lama—or the Kün-Dün as they call him—and the Tashi Lama of Shigatze, are the trusted outer representatives of the inner secret White Lodge, whose headquarters is said to be Sham-bha-la.

"It was like trying to illuminate a gas tank with electric sparks. A policeman's badge in a den of thieves as proof of good faith would have been child's play compared to that letter of Mordecai's.

"I had this from the abbot who runs this monastery. He's a gentle old philosopher, who told me what he knows about Rait in order to dissuade us from going forward. However, he admits that Benjamin's letter obliges him to help us on our way if we insist. Benjamin takes orders from the White Lodge, although he isn't a White and doesn't know much more about them than we do.

"Now here's the situation: The dugpas pounced on Rait and tortured him—mentally; they'd know too much to make his information unreliable by torturing his body; a man will say anything with a hot iron on the sole of his foot. They specialize in subtle processes.

"Rait told them he had written to you to follow him. Maybe they knew that already. I don't know what their means of communication is, but it's swift, for we know how Tsang-yang and Tsang-Mondrong were clapped on our trail. Their agents caught our two Tibetans in the shed in Sidiki's yard in Leh, and before they killed them, learned from them that we had talked with Mordecai. Mordecai knew too much; therefore so do we, and we're to be tempted to try to rescue Rait. They will either try to kill us up there in the mountains or else confront us with Rait, discover what we know, if anything, and kill the lot of us together. Or—now get this:

"They're hypnotists. They're incredibly expert psychologists. And they're just as keen on getting control of the whole world as, for instance, the Bolshevists are. They believe in their black science as enthusiastically as the Bolshevists believe in communism—much more enthusiastically, that is, than most Christians believe in Christianity. And remember: those men who have caught Rait are merely the small fry who take orders from the higher-ups behind the scenes.

"They may propose to catch us, and psychologize us, and make use of us in some way. The White Lodge accepts chelas. Christians make converts and put them to work. Everybody with a bug in his head tries to rope in everybody else—so why not dugpas?

"There's war between them and the White Lodge all the

time. Both sides practise secrecy to keep the other side from finding out their plans and methods.

"Now our friend Sidiki ben Mahommed, is as different from Rait as chalk from cheese in some respects, but he resembles him in others. He has been trying to play both sides simply for the love of the intrigue and for his own advantage. Rait was so inquisitive he would do anything to find out what he was after. Sidiki draws the line at too much danger, or too much hardship, and revolts from extremes, either good or evil, one way or the other."

"You forget my hospitality," Sidiki interrupted. "I have gone to great extremes in that respect, and at great danger to myself."

Grim ignored the interruption. "And Sidiki has this girl wife, who is a red-hot fool. She has fallen in love with a Tibetan who may be a low-rank dugpa whom she has hardly seen, but who has sent her messages by the mouth of an old woman who was allowed into Sidiki's house to charm warts. The old woman came frequently, and she is probably the dugpa's mother. She promised this little fool that she would be a Shape's* wife in Tibet if she did what she was told. That was why she tried to poison Mordecai, tried to burn her husband's house, and succeeded at the second attempt. The giant, whom Narayan Singh killed in the nick of time to prevent his killing you, was the lover's servant. They would probably have carried her off and sold the little fool in Baltistan or Tibet.

"And now Lhaten, the man who came to see us that night at Sidiki's invitation. Lhaten—so says the abbot of this monastery—is the chela, or disciple, of one of the initiates of the White Lodge. His real name isn't Lhaten; they never give their real names any more than the real insiders ever reveal themselves to rank outsiders, like ourselves for instance. Lhaten, so to speak, is a connecting link between Sham-bhala and the world outside, just as Benjamin is in a lesser degree."

"Lhaten," said Sidiki ben Mahommed, "is an extremely important personage. If I were not a better man than you describe me he would not have condescended to visit my house. I have carried out his orders very often. It is all one to him whether one is Moslem, Hindu, Christian or any other religion; what he looks for is character, and when he finds it he acts as, for instance, he acted toward me."

"The point is," Grim went on, "that Lhaten looked us over, and if Lhaten decides to help us, we've a chance to get

*A very high official in Tibet.

through—or so I'm told. But—you remember that big brute who came directly afterward—the long-haired, handsome brute who sat in the corner and wouldn't give his name—the man who knocked you half across the room when you took hold of him? He's a dugpa. He's one of their insiders, and he knows as much about us as Lhaten does.

"Lhaten won't do any man an injury. That other will stop at nothing."

"Furthermore, you will gain nothing even if you reach Sham-bha-la, and you may lose your lives or your reason in the attempt," said Sidiki. "As for me, I must remain here in this crow's-nest monastery. If I should try to return to Leh they would murder me. Dugpas can't get into this place. But what a life! Oh, what a prospect!"

I went back and lay down on the only bed (the others had mattresses spread on the floor). From the bottom of my heart I wished I had never heard of Rait. Grim seemed keener than ever on the expedition, but I suppose the after-effects of fever had left me weak of will as well as body; I could see no good in it. Sham-bha-la might be heaven or hell for ought I cared; I did not wish to go to either place.

But it seemed that we had crossed our Rubicon when we buried Mordecai and set our teeth into the wind across the Zogi-la. We could not return to Leh without risk of being murdered. Once in Leh we were sure to be accused as criminals. Sidiki probably would turn against us, to protect himself against the charge of having helped us toward Tibet; and his girl wife would betray him in the bargain!

It was too much like a nightmare to be interesting. It was cold enough and uncomfortable enough in that monastery cell, with the bitter smoke from tamarisk roots finding its way slowly through the open window to the zero air. (There was actually frost in the far corner of the room.) To cross seventeen-thousand-feet passes in mid-winter to the gale-swept plateau of Tibet seemed to me, just then, less attractive than death.

I sat up, meaning to tell Grim we had already been mad enough for one lifetime and that the sanest thing we could do now would be to try to return to India and take our chances of arrest. I knew that if I voted to return the others would almost have to return with me; and I was even feeling mean enough to cite my knife wounds (all comparatively superficial and all healing nicely) as a reason for retreat.

But as I opened my mouth to speak I thought of Rait again. I had a mental picture of him in a dungeon, going mad under torture vastly worse than physical and being tricked into writing a letter to me in the belief that one of his

torturers had taken pity on him. Rait had been my friend once—or I his, anyhow. I was the only man who had ever been his friend who would be likely to come to his rescue; and though the letter was a trap for me and whomever I might have with me, he probably did not realize that. The words I had meant to say were: "Let's go back!" What I actually said was:

"What's the use of arguing? Let's rescue Rait."

Grim seemed to think I was in delirium again; he took no notice. No thought about retreat had entered his head. He went on questioning the woman, and presently the old ivory-faced monk came in to change my bandages and smile and nod and treat me as if I were a child recovering from nothing much. He gave me filthy-tasting stuff to drink, and laughed as he touched with his toe my chest of medicines that stood beside the bed, then went out again spinning his prayer wheel.

After that I slept, I don't know how long, and when I awoke Lhaten was in the room. There were no lamps. The atmosphere was thick with smoke because the window shutter had been closed. They were sitting with firelight on their faces from the red-hot embers on the hearth, but Sidiki and his wife were not there.

The firelight made Chullunder Ghose look more than ever like the image of Chenresi on the wall—fat, philosophical, benevolent. Grim's eyebrows twitched, which meant that his brain was alert. Narayan Singh squatted motionless, from the waist upward like a soldier on parade. Lhaten was talking, in a rather loud voice because of the wind that howled outside, but his voice was humorous and gentle like that of a man telling incredible fairy tales to children.

"—No, the White Lodge is not at Sham-bha-la, but some of its brotherhood live there. The White Lodge never interferes with individuals, as such, any more than Nature may be said to interfere with individuals, as such. The greatest good of the greatest number always; and no favorites. Do the stars, for instance, limit their light to individuals? Yet one learns more about them than another. How? By trying; by concentration on the study. Do the stars come nearer? No. Do they treat him differently? No. Neither does the White Lodge make distinctions. It is secret, just as electricity was secret before Thales, Gilbert, Faraday, and all the others following them, discovered something about it. Electricity was there, always, but they had to find it; and having found it they could give it to the world, to use or misuse. Was electricity confined to any one place? No. Neither is the White Lodge confined to any one place. But some places are

more suitable than others, just as there are certain places where it is more practical to establish electric plants. Climate has a lot to do with thinking."

"How has the White Lodge kept its secret all these years?" Grim asked.

"Who kept the secret of electricity?" Lhaten answered. "Was there any need to keep it, while men were too stupid, or too busily engaged in cutting one another's throats (which is the same thing!) even to look for it? They were too superstitious to dare to investigate; afraid to be mocked or burned for heresy. Nowadays men know not much more, and they are as superstitious and as cocksure as ever. Nine tenths of them will mock you if you speak of the existence of the White Lodge; of the remaining tenth, some will try to put you in a lunatic asylum, some will curse you in the name of their religion, and the remainder will try to believe you for various reasons, most of them selfish. Selfishness prevents discovery of anything worth while. If you looked back at the history of invention you would find that no worth-while discovery has ever been made by a man or woman who worked solely for the profit there was in it. In every instance the greatness of the discovery has paralleled the degree of unselfishness of the discoverer. Selfishness makes people mentally blind. That is a scientific fact, which some day will be common knowledge."

Grim asked a poser then:

"Can we four find our way in?"

Lhaten laughed. "I am not your judge," he answered. "If you wish to turn back now before it is too late, I can protect you as far as the place you started from."

Grim's voice shot the answer back at him abruptly:

"None of us wishes to turn back."

Narayan Singh echoed him:

"I shall not turn back."

Chullunder Ghose sighed:

"I am afraid to turn back. I am afraid of my own opinion of myself, which is not good to begin with and would be intolerable if any worse."

"Rammy, old top, how about you?" Grim asked, for the creaking bed had announced I was awake.

The one thought uppermost in my mind was that we must rescue Rait. I said so. Lhaten answered:

"You will not succeed."

"We'll have a crack at it," said Grim.

There was silence after that for a long time, except that all coughed in the smoke. Lhaten was the next to speak:

"I warn you," he said. "If you go forward, you can no

more turn back than Galileo could, once he had made his discovery—or than Cæsar could, after he crossed the Rubicon. I speak of physical impossibilities—as, for instance, putting chickens back into the egg, or frogs back into tadpoles. The mere crossing of the mountains, difficult though it is, is the least of it. Let me try to explain: it is physical—absolutely physical, although not as you understand physics.

"Two of you are from the West and must have seen this often: a man creates a business—lives for it—loves it. That business is himself. Let us say that at fifty or sixty years of age he has a fortune and retires, intending to take life easy. How long is it, as a rule, before he dies? One year? Two years?

"But let us suppose that the same man undertakes a new activity in place of the old one. Instead of dying of the first disease that comes his way he lives his life out to a full conclusion. Why? Because he has regained momentum. He is going forward. He had explored his business until there were no new corners for him; now he explores new realms, and as long as he continues to explore them, he can live until his body wears out. But again, if he ceases, he dies—because nothing in nature is allowed to stand still.

"Now observe, because this applies to you: the man who has given up his business without having fully exhausted its possibilities for him, can return to it and so save himself. He has not yet grown out of the egg. But if he has exhausted all the possibilities for him of what he left, he cannot return to it and live.

"It is for you to consider whether you will not now return to the world you have run away from. It may be you can live your lives out to their full conclusion. But if you decide to go forward, you have first to prove that you are fitted to discover what you seek; and there is no way to prove that except by doing it. Like men engaged in an experiment with unknown forces, you will be in constant danger. If, in spite of all the dangers, you should make your great discovery, you would then be like tadpoles that have evolved into frogs. You would have escaped the tadpole dangers, only to find frog enemies from whom the White Lodge would have to protect you until you should learn how to protect yourselves. And now tell me this: Can you think of one man, who ever discovered anything worth while, who has not had to cope with mysterious obstructions placed in his path? Name anyone you like—poet, musician, astronomer, chemist, philosopher—or consider yourselves; have you ever accomplished anything without apparently intelligent obstruction meeting you at every turn? It is like going uphill; there is a law of

gravity against you. The desire to go uphill—to discover something, that is—is the impulse of life, and there are those who continually study the laws which govern it. Those are the great ones whom you seek. The downhill pull—the activity of ignorance, prejudice, passion, superstition—that is the law of death; and there are they who study that, who revel in it, who identify themselves with it. They are the enemy; and they are deadly dangerous.

"There are laws which govern all phenomena, and a man who discovers a law of electricity not only can produce effects with it but also can make electricity available to others. Whoever discovers more recondite laws can produce effects with them and make their effects available to others. He may not be able to make others understand the law, but he can give others its benefit or impose on them the resultant evil—as in the case of electricity, for instance, or, in another instance, poison gas.

"A man who would not know how to begin to make electric light can have its benefit, because of the mental labors of Faraday, Edison, Tesla and others. A man who would not know how to begin to make poison gas can obtain it and use it against others, or suffer from it, because of the mental processes of those who have studied how to deal with death.

"Now practically all men who have made a great discovery have done so in the hope of benefiting all humanity. Perhaps the chemist who discovered poison gas intended it to be used for beneficial purposes; and so it can be used. It is the misuse of a force that makes it evil, and it is possible to misuse any force whatever—the forces of steam, electricity, chemistry, religion—and the prodigious force of thought.

"Therefore, they who study life, and who have discovered many of the secrets of the universe, oblige themselves to guard those secrets; because there are others who would use them to make mischief. They who study death are no less in communion with occult forces than are they who study life, and they are equally whole-hearted in their persistence—as you can readily understand if you remember how gravity opposes every effort to rise upward. Follow up that analogy and recall how great teachers have been attacked, vilified, and very often, murdered.

"If a man makes a great medical discovery, what happens? Do not the charlatans pounce on his discovery and use it for their own enrichment?——Now do you begin to see why *they*, who are known by rumor only, save to a very few who have seen and spoken with them, are obliged to live in secret and to hide their knowledge from the world? Could they dare to

release their knowledge except to individuals whom they know and trust?

"And who are those whom they shall trust? Is it not obvious they must be of a certain character? Morals depend on character, remember, and not character on morals. A man's religion makes no difference—none whatever. Can two men belonging to different religions not at one and the same moment discover a new comet or an unknown law of mathematics? To pursue evil a man must have evil tendencies which will increase through cultivation as he becomes more and more responsive to the impulses that govern evil. Owls live in the dark. Whales swim in the sea. Men with scientific tendencies discover laws of nature. Only those who have the character pertaining to the path they choose can succeed in the end; and though a shoemaker, like Kabir, can become a poet, that was because he had the poet's nature. In the same way, only they who have the necessary character can find or be received into the White Lodge, although anybody can receive its benefits, as anyone may read the poems of Kabir.

"And they who are the Keepers of the Secrets can read character as you can read a book."

Lhaten ceased and there was silence until Narayan Singh stirred the embers with a stick, selecting a few pieces of dry wood and putting them to burn carefully so as not to increase the smoke.

"As for myself, I have slain many men," he remarked. "How is that as to character?"

"How many men did the Lord Buddha slay?" asked Lhaten.

"None," he answered.

"There you err," said Lhaten. "Did he not teach? Were there not many slain simply because they approved his teachings and adopted them?"

"I slew with mine own hand," the Sikh said.

"For gain? From fear? In passion?" Lhaten asked. "Nay, nay! Don't answer! I am not your judge. It is not I who must say yes or no."

"I know that. If you were he, I would fight you," said Narayan Singh.

Chullunder Ghose piped up, his voice peculiarly strained and squeaky, though it was normally a well-placed baritone:

"Am personally peaceful, never having slain man or beast. Moreover, I have taught nothing that could cause men to be killed. I am failed B. A., but I have more intelligence than the examiners who marked my papers. Might I not be a suitable jar, for the teachers to pour their wisdom into me, that I may pour it out again?"

"In driblets, at a profit?" Lhaten asked.

"But I must live," said the babu.

"Live then," Lhaten answered. "It is not I who will prevent. The Wisdom can neither be bought nor sold, being like virtue which, if man or woman should sell it, could never have been virtue."

"Can a man know beforehand whether he can make the grade?" asked Grim.

"If not, how should he succeed?" asked Lhaten. "A man may know he *can* succeed, and yet fail; but unless he knows he can, he never will."

There was another long silence, broken only by the sound of coughing and the gusts of wind that rattled the wooden shutter. Then Grim asked a question that was uppermost in my mind:

"Who gives these their authority?"

Lhaten laughed. "Who gave Galileo his authority to find out that the earth moves? The authorities forbade him, didn't they? They forced him to recant, and he was much too sensible to make a martyr of himself and flatter his own vanity by being burned alive. He had let the truth out; and the same authority within himself that gave him leave to do that also warned him to protect himself by letting the fools believe they had suppressed truth. But truth, once out, can never be suppressed, although it can be imitated and misused. The proof of a man's authority is in its consequences. There is no authority from outside. All comes from within. But they are rare who recognize authority; and they are still more rare who have the courage to obey it. Some call it conscience, which is a lame word, having fallen from a high place."

Once more there was silence, but the wind outside howled like a host of furies and somewhere in the monastery building bronze bells summoned monks to midnight ritual. Again Narayan Singh put dry wood on the embers and the flame leaped up illuminating Grim's face. Lhaten was in darkness.

"Who are these Mahatmas—men?" Grim asked.

"Very plain men," Lhaten answered. "Wisdom avoids vanity. Was Newton vain? Or Beethoven? Or Lao Tse?"

"Who taught them what they know?" Grim asked.

"Who taught the years to roll onward? Or the earth to move around the sun? There are greater than they, whom they know from afar off, dimly, even as you have heard of them and seek them. The Mahatmas, to themselves, are ordinary men, too fallible, beset by their own perplexities. Our problems are very simple to them, because they mastered such elementary conditions as ours—in former lives; which is why they are called Masters. They have advanced to

higher problems. Does a child at school not have to learn his alphabet, which to the one who can read has become part of his very nature, like the ability to breathe? Next, does he not learn to read, which to him may be difficult, although foolishly easy to the older child who has advanced to foreign languages. Does he not have to learn arithmetic by practise? Does that not lead on to algebra, and to equations, and to calculus—each step requiring mastery by hard work consciously directed to the end in view? Are there not realms to be mastered, each advance revealing new realms unimaginable to the student who has not yet reached them—so that he who knows the most is most aware of how illimitable knowledge is?

"It is so with life—with men. A newsboy lives in a world of short horizons and extremely sharply drawn convictions. But he gains by the experience. He rises and becomes a clerk. And is he not now in a new world? Is any contour of it quite the same, or are the old associations as important? Values have altered, or rather his sense of them. Good: let us say he has character; he goes on up until he manages a business. And at each new forward step do his horizons not increase? Imagine him at last, the President of the United States. Could he return into the newsboy mold—or cease to have a sympathy for newsboys, or for clerks or managers or for all the men in circumstances he himself has battled with?

"It is the same with all life: everything is evolving into something else. What then becomes of men who have evolved above your plane and mine without as yet becoming more than men? They can understand us, having been as we are. Can we understand them? Could they associate with us, to our advantage or to theirs, any better than a president could live among the newsboys, or than Einstein, let us say, could live among race-course touts? Would any of *you* choose to live among the riffraff of the docks? Or, if you had the opportunity, would you refuse to influence that riffraff for their good, to the extent that they could understand you?

"Forgive me if I seem too frank, for I do not intend discourtesy. The difference between you and the riffraff of the brothels of Bombay is not greater than the difference between the Masters and yourselves. Should they then associate with you? And what good would it do?"

"What happens if a man should try to make that grade—and fails?" Grim asked him.

Lhaten seemed to hesitate, as if he listened to the wind under the monastery eaves. Then:

"How are the ranks of master criminals recruited?" he asked. "What happens when a scientist goes wrong, or a

philosopher, or any educated man? Is he not worse than the ignorant? Is he not more dangerous? So—whence do you suppose the ranks of dugpas are recruited? The White Lodge will exclude, but it will never kill. Then what shall he do who has learned much, yet has erred because of evil in him and by his own lack of integrity excludes himself? Can he forget his knowledge? Envy, hatred and malice enter into him and he becomes a leader of the enemies of light. He calls his darkness light and seeks to justify himself by deeds. He uses his intelligence to smother light, identifies himself with all negation and attracts to himself all those who by nature are unwilling to resist or are too stupid to prevent him. That is the source of the legend of fallen angels."

"What finally becomes of them?" asked Grim.

Lhaten stared at the embers a while. Then, at last: "What becomes of the fire that has eaten the wood?" he replied. "Fire is a bad master. Better to grow trees, though fire come and consume them. The very worst that fire can do is to release the elements of what it burns. Does any of you wish your very spirit to revert into its elements? Serve evil if you do. Become a dugpa. It is first a little comfortable fire that warms the intellect; and some, by growing used to heat, endure it for a long time. Even rocks burn when the heat grows great enough. Better to grow trees and guard against the fire."

He left the room then silently, as if he had said too much, closing the door without making a sound, and for an hour, I dare say, we all stared into the embers while the wind howled like the baying of the dogs of Death, from over the Roof of the World beyond which lay the deserts and the mystery of Tibet—until at last I fell asleep and dreamed about black devils torturing Rait in a dungeon underneath a mountain, where Grim and Narayan Singh had gone away and left me. It seemed to be my turn to be tortured next.

It is easy to kill. It is equally easy to destroy glass windows. But the one act no more solves a problem than the other. Both are foolishness, since any fool can do them. Why is it only the wise who perceive that it is wisdom to let live, when even lunatics can sometimes understand that it is better to open a window than to smash the glass?

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A DUGPA AND A MYSTERY AS EASY TO ELUCIDATE AS THAT OF LIFE AND DEATH.

THE following morning Grim gave me the news: Lhaten had come all the way from Leh to tell us that Sidiki ben Mahommed's two senior wives were safe and being cared for by their relatives; his house and all his stores were burned to ashes but the cattle had been saved and none of his servants injured. There was a hue and cry for Sidiki, and for ourselves, who were reported to be Tibetan bandits; and the discovery of dead bodies in the snow, a mile away from the burned house, had led the police to suppose that we bandits had quarreled among ourselves as to the possession of Sidiki's girl-wife. The fact that Sidiki had not been found dead had led to the presumption he was being held for ransom.

Sidiki's two senior wives had been questioned and had talked, of course. But they had told such a weird story about two white men in disguise, in company with two Indians and two Tibetans, accepting Sidiki's hospitality in order to be able to admit the other bandits in the night, that nobody believed a word they said and they themselves were actually under the suspicion of having betrayed Sidiki to his enemies on the score of jealousy, it being notorious that the new young wife had had the household by the ears.

"The long and short of it is," said Grim, "that nobody believes we're white men and nobody feels inclined to send an expedition after us. The storms have covered our tracks, and between us and Leh the drifts have become pretty well impassable. So we're safe from pursuit. We can go forward. We can't go back.

"Sidiki and his wife will have to stay here until spring, when he proposes to make his way to Delhi and cash that draft on Benjamin you promised him. By that time we'll be in Tibet, or else dead, so it won't matter whether Sidiki talks or not. Lhaten has promised to get word to Benjamin about

Mordecai's fate; he's to be told we did our best for his son-in-law, which will leave the old man feeling that we haven't neglected our obligation to him.

"Lhaten seems to come and go as he pleases. I don't know how he does it, but there are probably lines of communication where snow won't lie because of wind or some such reason; and the whole of this country is dotted with hermits. You can't make me believe that a thousand hermits would all choose to live in limestone caves in wintertime just for the sake of being lonely. One man,—ten men might; not a thousand. The story, of course, is they're meditating on the life to come. It's this life that amuses me; I'll bet they feel the same about it. You know how a man can use his time up listening in on radio. And d'you remember how, when Younghusband reached Lhassa with his troops, they knew it in Bombay before the government had the news in Simla? Radio was a pipe dream twenty years ago. Will you bet me that twenty years from now men can't dispense with radio and relay thought without the use of electricity? Will you bet me it isn't the hermits all over Asia who pass thought-waves along? Can you give me a better guess how information travels—true and false? We know it does travel. Did you ever talk with a hermit who hadn't all the latest news?"

A more important problem at the moment was for me to get in shape to travel. The knife wounds and the pounding that the giant gave me had left me stiff and weak, although the wounds were healing in the mountain air with the aid of the old monk's nursing and mysterious drugs. He came in every hour or two with his prayer wheel, and when he neded both hands to change the bandages he would give the wheel to Chullunder Ghose with orders to keep it spinning. It seemed to make no difference to him whose hand made the imprisoned paper charms revolve provided their motion did not cease all the while he was in the room.

Grim busied himself meanwhile with monastery manuscripts. The library was underneath the building in a cellar that was partly natural cave and partly hewn out of the rock. Some of the "books" were rolls, as much as fifty feet long; others were sheets of ancient paper tied between wooden blocks; there were enough of them to have kept a dozen translators busy for a lifetime, but there were not more than forty monks in the monastery, of whom not more than ten or twelve could read that ancient script. They not only did not object to Grim's exploring among their treasures, but actually carried up the books for him into the cell, and the abbot himself, who sometimes helped Grim to translate them, even

gave him one of them from which Grim has quoted so often that I have a number of its paragraphs by heart.

That abbot was a gently smiling ancient of days, as genial toward us as he was stern with all the monastery household. He was a little man, wrinkled and stooped, with a beard like a Chinaman's, who wore black robes much too big for him, so that he could fold them over and over against the draughts that made him shiver. He was hugely amused with Chullunder Ghose, from whom he endured outrageous banter with emotions that suggested an old maid being flattered by Don Juan; but if one of his monks looked sidewise at him, or as much as smiled at any of the babu's jokes, he reproved him instantly and ordered draconic penances—such as ten thousand repetitions of a long prayer on the monastery roof, where the wind blew through a leather overcoat like water through a sieve.

"You are a bad rascal—a bad rascal!" he assured the babu. "You will be reborn as a fish for having mocked the Lord Chenresi, whose outward shape you so resemble. There is no hair on a fish," he added, apropos apparently of nothing.

He called Grim his son (which gave Chullunder Ghose fresh opportunities for scandalous insinuations), and he spent hours trying to find in ancient books some proof that Jimgrim was a word of Pali origin with roots that could be traced into the very womb of dawn. Neither Grim nor any one else could guess whether he was in earnest or merely amusing himself; he seemed to be a mixture of the rankest superstition, almost absolute unworldliness and variegated knowledge. But there was no doubt whatever about his liking for Grim, or about his dislike for Narayan Singh.

He vowed he could smell blood on the Sikh, and invariably held his nose and looked away from him when he entered the room, keeping the Sikh on his left-hand side whenever possible. He seemed to like to sit at Grim's feet, making him take the carved square stool, that was carried wherever he went for him to squat on, and himself sitting on the mat that was placed in front of it.

His mixture of frankness and reticence was not much different from that of any high dignitary of an established and historic church; he would discuss things one expected him to shy off from, and grow suddenly silent—even leave the room—when one of us asked him something, that, to us, seemed commonplace. He did not in the least mind talking about dugpas, although he spun his prayer wheel while he did it; but when I asked him by whose authority Benjamin had been given the key to the secret route into Tibet he looked at

me as if I had slapped his face and went out, slamming the door and scolding the monk who waited for him. For two days after that he would not speak to me.

"Dugpas?" he said in answer to one of Grim's questions. "Spiritual criminals. Look out for them! Look out for them! I have some in this monastery. You say to a dugpa 'Bless you,' and he tries to use the blessing for a stick to beat you with. You say to him 'This is so,' and his mind begins to work at once to prove it isn't so. You say to him 'Love your enemies,' and he goes to work to make some enemies, yourself first, in order to have someone to love. You show him money; he begins to think of how to imitate it out of baser metals. You make peace in your household; he proceeds to try to break it up. He thinks vice is virtue. He looks upon virtue as vice."

"Why not get rid of your dugpas?" Grim suggested.

"How?" he asked and cackled with comical laughter, looking at Grim like an old grandparent amusing himself with a favorite grandson.

"Kick them out," Grim suggested.

"Kick out a bellyache! Why not? Cut off your nose because it bothers you to blow it—eh? As for me, I prefer to blow my nose. Did you ever try to sweep out darkness with a broom? It's easy. Only when you've finished, there's the darkness still there. There won't be any dugpas in the monastery when I've got rid of all the dugpas here." He touched himself over the heart.

"Do you mean you're a sorcerer yourself?" Grim asked.

The old eyes twinkled and the wrinkled lips moved as if he were chewing something while he thought out a reply.

"Teach a child arithmetic," he said at last, "and he can use it to cheat with, can't he? Teach a man the laws and forces of the universe, and he can turn them against his teacher, can't he? Give a child a box of matches, and there will always be someone to show him how to set fire to a house. Teach me spiritual knowledge, and for every one desire to use it rightly I shall have a thousand impulses to do the wrong thing. Persistence in thinking the wrong thing makes a man a fool if he is untaught and a dugpa if he knows too much. Do you think you know enough to be a dugpa?"

Grim denied having any ambition in that direction.

The old abbot chuckled at him.

"Nevertheless, my son, you are a mixture of good and bad like any other man. The good and bad is in your mind—or at any rate, that is where you think it is. So it is your mind that learns. And as the good learns, so the bad learns and there is war between the two. Your bad side—I am trying to use

terms that you will understand—will seek to use your knowledge on the side of evil; and it is that side of you that the dugpas, who are vastly your superiors in evil, will continually cultivate. As long as there is any evil in you dugpas will discover it, as flies find rotten meat.—It will be a long time before there is no evil in you," he added dryly.

"Is that how you account for criminality?" asked Grim.

"How do you account for virtue?" asked the abbot. "Do I not teach virtue, day in and day out, to a number of ingrate monks? And am I not one inconsiderable teacher among thousands? All over the world are there not superiors and their subordinates, of all sorts and kinds of creeds, who all teach virtue or try to teach it? Well, I tell you there are just as many who teach non-virtue and with just as much enthusiasm, though they call it something else. As there are lamas, cardinals, archbishops and professors of virtue, so there are lamas, cardinals, archbishops and professors of non-virtue. At each step upward that a man takes, he must choose all over again on which side of the ladder he will climb. There is magic in good; there is sorcery in evil. Non-virtue, which is sorcery, has no existence until virtue, which is magic, finds expression first; but for every light there are at once a million shadows, and nobody has to tell the shadow where to find the light; it is created by the light, and by the very virtue of the light it procreates non-virtue. Moreover, it would smother virtue if it could, just as the water, in which only fish can live, would smother men. Therefore, beware of the dugpas, who are all they who say no to virtue, and who for every gleam of light invent its opposite. There are grades and grades of them—little, ignorant, unwise ones who are at the mercy of the others and commit crimes without knowing what or why—and wise, far-seeing ones who understand the laws of evil."

"Show me a dugpa," said Grim. "You say some of your monks are dugpas."

"Aye, show us one," Narayan Singh echoed. "I will show you a good way to deal with him."

The abbot rang the copper bell he carried at his waist. The cell door opened and the monk came in whose duty for the day it was to wait on him and to carry his stool and carpet. He was a very ordinary-looking, plain-faced man with dull, uninterested eyes.

"There are degrees, and then degrees of them," the abbot said, and made a gesture. The monk picked up his stool and mat, and the abbot walked out of the room with his prayer wheel twirling, followed by the other rutching sandals in his wake.

"You have offended him," Chullunder Ghose remarked. "Such holy men as he don't like to be asked to betray even dugpas."

But Narayan Singh took a long Tibetan sword out of a corner and tested its sharpness with his thumb, holding it then between feet and knees and beginning to file the edge.

"I think we shall see a dugpa," he said pleasantly.

That night while we slept in our separate corners, with the shutter fastened and the embers dying dull-red on the hearth, a sound like a footfall awoke me suddenly. For a while I lay still. The cell door had been left unfastened to admit the old monk who visited me at intervals to dose me and change my bandages and I supposed the intruder was he. But nobody came to my bedside, so I stared toward the hearth. There was someone sitting there, his face toward me and his back toward Narayan Singh; he appeared to be fanning the embers, and I still thought it was the old physician.

But suddenly the embers flared and a red blaze shone on the man's face. I felt the hair rise all over my body. He was the same long-haired and classically handsome man who had visited us in Sidiki's house and offered to protect us from Lhaten, that night our Tibetans were murdered.

He was sitting in exactly the same posture as he had then, with the same immobility, the same half-contemptuous expression on his face. He seemed to be waiting for us to speak to him, but none spoke—though I could hear Chullunder Ghose's teeth chattering. There was no sound from Narayan Singh or Grim. I did not know whether they were awake.

The man sat without moving until the blaze died down again and his face receded into shadow. Then a voice, that was his, but that hardly seemed to come from him, spoke very clearly, in an accent of command:

"You are in danger. You must leave this place. You may wait for the dawn, but no longer."

"Whose orders?" I asked.

I sat up on the bed. Chullunder Ghose was clutching at his blankets and his teeth were going like castanets, but there was still no sound from Narayan Singh or Grim. The embers were dying, but I could see the man's eyes.

"The orders of them who will guide you to where you shall go," he replied.

He spoke English, but that did not strike me as peculiar at the time.

"What is the danger?" I asked him.

In the dim glow from the embers he had become hardly visible, but he stood up. I could see that. His anger was almost tangible.

"Disobedience is death!" he answered.

Suddenly there came the swish of steel in air, and a thwack as a sword struck home into the man's neck from behind. He fell forward with a groan on to the embers. Someone pulled him off them, struck a match, lighted our lantern, and I saw Grim leaning over him. Behind the hearth Narayan Singh stood with the sharp sword in his hand.

"So I deal with dugpas!" said Narayan Singh, and Grim looked up.

"Take a *dekko* at him," he exclaimed.

He held the lantern so that all of us might see the man who lay there with his neck three-quarters severed. He was clean shaven. He did not bear the least resemblance to the bearded man who had come and spoken with us in Sidiki's house. He was the monk who had attended on the abbot that day, carrying his stool and mat—snub-nosed, dull-eyed and unintelligent!

There be many gurus, and some good ones whom it is no great task to differentiate, seeing that those who make the loudest claim are least entitled to respect. They who are the true guides into Knowledge know that nothing can be taught, although the learner easily can be assisted to discover what is in himself. Other than which there is no knowledge of importance, except this: that what is in himself is everywhere.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LHATEN'S GURU.

It was something below zero in the room. Grim pulled on his overcoat and went to the door to summon a monk to tell the abbot what had happened; but as he opened the door the abbot entered, hurrying, with a monk behind him. Chullunder Ghose threw himself face downward on his mattress and pulled up the blankets trying to pretend he was still asleep.

Grim held the lantern in midroom, its light on the old abbot's wrinkled face, the corpse in shadow.

"What brought you?" he asked.

"Who slew?" asked the abbot, in the harsh voice that he used to discipline his monks.

Narayan Singh, wiping the sword on the dead man's clothing, grunted:

"I slew a dugpa. Did I not say I should show you how to deal with one?"

"Man of blood! Man of blood!" said the abbot. "You befoul my monastery. Go now! All of you must go."

He glanced toward me.

"Can you travel?" he asked.

I would have died outside in the snow rather than remain there after being asked to leave the place. I made him such answer, as politely as I could. Grim started to ask questions; the old fellow silenced him with an angry exclamation and a gesture.

"Maniac!" he spluttered at Narayan Singh. The Sikh stood erect like a man on parade, his eyes glowing in the lamplight.

"You know well I slew a dugpa," he retorted.

"Incorrigible butcher! You shall be reborn into a boar! Men and the dogs and the other boars shall hunt you! Slew a dugpa? You have cracked a jar and let the water out!"

"He changed himself into a man with a beard," said the Sikh. "These eyes beheld him."

"Fool!" exclaimed the abbot. "Can a tree not cast a shadow on a wall? Can even you not see your image in a pool? Shall not an arch dugpa then use this poor weakling to reflect his image?"*

The old man's anger made him stutter. He raised his staff and struck Chullunder Ghose to force him to get up from the mattress.

"Go!" he ordered. "You shall have my blessing, save the one who slew. If that one should stay here he would make a shambles of the place—he lets in death—he is in league with death—he——"

"Nay, nay, holy one, no curses!" said Narayan Singh. "If I have done wrong I am already cursed enough."

"Slayer, if I bless you, you will slay more!" said the abbot.

"If you curse me, will I slay less?" asked the Sikh.

"Die then by the sword," the abbot answered, "for I see you are an honest man. You will serve some though you injure others. You shall eat your own sin and be done with it."

Narayan Singh bowed proudly to him, suggesting rather tolerance than too much faith in the old abbot's vision.

"Jimgrim, my son," said the abbot, "I could have taught you much—but not these. You are a better one than any of my monks, yet you come with a crew of brawlers and my monastery is in danger through them. This one" (he pointed at me) "shall have medicines lest he die by the way. Such virtue as he has is in his friendship. He may win through on that account. I doubt it. That one" (he made a gesture with his staff in the direction of Chullunder Ghose) "is a coward whose curiosity is greater than his cowardice; whose honesty is stronger than his zeal. His cunning shall protect him, though his flesh shall be a weariness." He pointed at Narayan Singh. "Death is no answer to riddles," he said, "as you shall know when you are slain, you who have slain so many."

He turned to go, giving his staff to the monk who attended him and beginning to spin his prayer wheel, but I broke the

*According to some authorities this process accounts for a large percentage of the idiots immured in lunatic asylums. It is said that, through vicious habits and in various other ways, they render themselves unable to resist the imposition of other wills on theirs—even of a number of other wills at one time. If true, this would account for the sudden criminal outbursts of otherwise apparently sane people. Whether true or not, there are millions of people who believe—and there is plenty of circumstantial evidence—that experts in malignant hypnotism and thought transmission can project their own personal appearance as well as superimpose their will on another. Compare the Bible, H. P. Blavatsky, Eliphas Levy, and scores of other writers on the subject.

silence by asking him what was to be done about Sidiki ben Mahommed and his young wife. He turned in the doorway, answering impatiently:

"What are they to you?"

"I owe the man money," I told him.

"Then pay it," he retorted irritably. "So much talk about such unimportant things!"

Presently monks came into our cell to carry out the dead one. Others waited for us to pack up our belongings. Nothing was left undone to make it obvious that our welcome had expired although no actual discourtesy was offered. Evidently someone told Sidiki we were leaving, for he came in a great state of excitement carrying paper, pen and ink-horn.

"You go, sahibs? You go? And at this hour? You were not—you were not forgetting——?"

I wrote him his order on Benjamin, attaching no conditions to it, knowing that if there were any peculiar wording about the order or anything that might arouse Benjamin's suspicions the old Jew would refuse to honor it. Grim, Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose all added their signatures as witnesses, and before we left the place I persuaded the old abbot to attach his seal.

Sidiki wept at our departure. He pretended he would like to come with us and swore he would have done so but for having a young wife on his hands.

"Nor can I leave her, sahibs. You don't know this country. They would make a cuckold of me before my back was turned! There is something in me of Lord Roberts—I should oh, so dearly love this campaign into the unknown—yes, yes, I should love it. But my honor—a man's honor is his first consideration. I must wait here until spring, when these monks will kindly escort me as far as Leh, where I shall appeal for government protection and proceed to Delhi. Is your honor *sure* this money will be paid to me by Benjamin?"

In darkness, for it lacked two hours of dawn, we watched our loads, and then Narayan Singh and the babu, being lowered in a great basket between natural rock bastions, and heard the basket—wind blown—crash against the rock wall in fathomless darkness. My turn and Grim's came at last, and, knowing something about pit-head gears, I sat near the rickety wooden winch manipulated by two monks, and examined the rope made of leather and various odds and ends. It occurred to me to ask whether there was no other way of leaving the place.

I was told that the steps hewn in the rock could not be used in winter because of ice that spoiled the foot- and

finger-hold; but the old abbot did his best to reassure me about the two-monk-power elevator, pointing to a prayer wheel, yoked by a leather belt in such a way that a thousand prayers were repeated automatically at each revolution of the winch.

"So you are quite safe," he answered me. "They who raise and lower the cage have orders that if the rope should break they must continue turning. Thus blessing would accompany the dissolution. There would be no curse in such a death."

He grieved sincerely at our going but assured Grim that after one of us had shed blood he had neither authority nor will to offer us another minute's hospitality.

"Bloodshed within!" he exclaimed. "Who then shall protect us from the bloodshed from without?"

Grim offered no apology; it would have been lame and useless; probably it would have shut off speech, whereas there was something about the old abbot's attitude and the way he champed his jaws that suggested he had something he would still say if we let him. A mere regular ritual blessing might set his own conscience at ease as having done what duty indicated, but a few more words of explanation of the dugpa mystery would be a much more acceptable parting gift from our bewildered point of view. They came as we waited in silence while the two monks wound up the cage on its complaining wooden roller.

"Since dugpas wished to get you out of here, where you were safe, how else should they expel you than by causing you to expel yourselves by violence? When fools make war they expend their resources squandering money and life and food until the victor loses with the vanquished, and another, who is wiser, overwhelms them both. No dugpa would do such foolishness. He sacrifices little dugpas, even as the governments send soldiers to be slain, because there are always plenty who will fill the lower ranks. But one little sleepy, stupid, belly-loving dugpa is as useful to him as an army that a government flatters and sends to its death; because he wages war by causing his enemy to make mistakes, and he wins not by what he himself does, but through the self-destroying acts of whomsoever he would conquer."

"Do you mean to say," Grim asked him, "that the dugpas actually calculated that Narayan Singh would kill that monk of yours?"

The bitter wind was whistling and moaning and the winch squeaked like an animal in pain. Flickering lamplight filled the low-roofed open shed in which we waited, but beneath us the rope vanished into blackness and there were not even shadows to show where a dozen monks stood watching,

hardly two arms' length away from us. The old abbot thought a while, and chewed the cud of his reflection, spitting at last before he spoke:

"The wind blows. Where there is a window open, or a key-hole or a cranny or a crack, does the wind not find its way? Thought is much thinner than wind. That Sikh is predisposed to shedding blood, and he who sheds blood may not stay in this place. There is a force that makes men shed blood, even as another force will make them commit another sin—even as the wind makes windmills turn. He who is not on guard against the dugpas will obey the forces they direct."

Grim answered with one of his comical smiles which mean he is mocking himself as much as anyone:

"Magic would make a wonderful excuse for a criminal on trial! Unfortunately, in the West we don't believe in it."

"Of course not," said the abbot gently. "In the East we are older. We know more. *We* know what threw the whole world into war. And if the dugpas wish to rule you, what is plainer than that they will first of all make you believe there are no such things as dugpas? Does a man who will break in and steal first announce what he will do, and how he will do it, and when? Do your criminals in the West not make you all believe they are honest citizens? Be on guard against dugpas, my son!"

Then the basket came up through the hole and he blessed us while we stepped into the swaying thing. The last we saw of him was his old wrinkled ivory face framed in yellow lamplight and black shadow as he clung to a beam and peered down watching our descent. After that we were both of us busy with poles for a long time, fending off the basket from the cliff side as the two monks lowered us, we never knew how many hundred feet, to the platform of rock at the head of a track that descended along the lip of a snow-hung precipice into the valley.

In a cavern thick with dung, whose opening was sheltered from the wind by a clump of tamarisks that had rooted themselves in fissures in the platform, all our ponies waited—fat and villainously quarrelsome from lack of work. There was only one lantern and but two monks there to help us lift the loads on, while the ponies kicked their heels up at the cavern roof, bit, squealed and broke loose to hide in dark corners.

So it was dawn, for all our haste, before we took the trail at last and rode, with one leg over the edge of a precipice and the other being skinned against the cliff, down a declivity that seemed to lead into the bowels of the earth. Above us there were gilded peaks that shone like lightning, so that we

could hardly bear to glance at them with the icy wind making our eyes run. Beneath us was a gruesome black hole, colder as the track descended, full of alternating silences and sounds of savage cataclysm as the wind broke great icicles away and sent them splintering on unseen rocks.

Unguided, we could not have found our way among those gorges for a single hour. More often than not there was no track to be seen at all until we actually found it under us, with the ponies picking their way like cats where one false footstep would have meant destruction. It was a goat trail, cunningly marked and helped out here and there by pick and shovel, along the line of the prevailing wind, where snow could never lie deep even in the storms.

The monk who led us, wrapped to the ears in yak-skin, riding an ancient mule, kept singing to himself a tune that sounded older than the hills, the same few bars of a simple melody ever and ever repeated, reaching us in fragments between gusts of wind. It suggested a pagan hymn to nature, but Grim said the words were all about beer and pretty ladies. He never glanced back at us once to make sure we were following, and when the ponies rose like moving steps above us and we caught sight of him turning around some pinnacle of rock sharp-cut against the sky, he had the air of leaving the whole business of leading to his old mule, that seemed to know the way as intimately as if he carried a man along it every day of his existence.

The last half of that day's march was nightmare in which I clung to the saddle desperately, growing weaker at every leap the pony made and trying not to let Grim know how ill I felt. One wound reopened and I felt the blood ooze; and though I took the medicines the abbot gave me, and drank brandy now and then from Grim's flask when there was room for two of us to halt together on the track, the cold began to creep into my wounds and fill me with the thought of how comfortable death would be.

I contrived to finish the day's work only by remembering Mordecai and his retreat over the passes, alone, sick, starving, hunted. I did not propose that Mordecai should play the man and I lie down under less than half his difficulties; and in a sort of half-delirium I clung on during the last hour of a scampering, struggling climb imagining I actually was the battered Jew escaping from Tibetan enemies in devil masks.

The noise of Grim's clambering pony behind me became galloping monks. The volleys of echoes, as stones went rattling off the ledge over the precipice, were rifle shots. It seemed to me that I was making for a wayside inn, which, funnily enough, contained white-shirted waiters and a jazz

band, where the *nemo* (who was Benjamin's fat daughter, spreading food on a yellow tablecloth under an ancient temple lamp) would presently be beaten to make her tell my name and hiding-place.

I was almost unconscious when at last I rolled into a man's arms and was carried somehow into a cave whose entrance had been masked against the wind by a barrier of limestone blocks and mud.

I remember I thought I was going to die and the prospect was not unattractive. That cave had the feel of a sepulcher, although it was warmed by a good fire of tamarisk branches. The voices of my friends appeared to reach me faintly from a mile away, as if I had already passed into the borderland of death, and I was not even vaguely interested in what they were talking about. I no longer felt cold, and though they laid me near the fire I did not feel the heat. There seemed to be a vast dark wilderness in front of me, which I must traverse presently toward a dim light in the distance, and anything that took my mind off that was an annoyance.

I don't know how long I lay in that condition, but at last I began to rebel against something (I did not know what) that was pulling me back in the direction of my friends. I tried to summon all my will power to resist the interference—even tried to cry out to my friends to help me shake the interference off. I think it was my own voice that I heard first. Then Grim's:

"Rammy, old top, wake up, confound you! You've got no right to die here. It's a rotten breach of hospitality. Save up your dying for later on when it won't be so infernally inconvenient!"

I was conscious of being shaken violently and of feeling indignant. It occurred to me as indecent to disturb a dying man, but I did not associate the shaking with Grim's hands that had me by the shoulders.

Then I heard a strange voice, speaking Pushtu: "Any fool can die. The thing is to know when to die."

Strange though the statement looks on a written page, it was that argument that made me cease resistance to the force that appeared to be pulling me back into the world. I saw it as unfair to Grim to leave him and began to wish myself alive again and strong enough to help him in some undertaking—although what the undertaking might be I could neither remember nor imagine. Soon after that I tasted brandy in my mouth, and then there was another lapse into unconsciousness.

I awoke in utter darkness but rolled over on a heap of blankets and saw that our loads had been set up like a wall

between me and a fire in the midst of the cave. Narayan Singh heard me move and, pulling a couple of loads aside to make a passage, brought me water in a clay pitcher. Someone threw fresh wood on the fire, and by the light of the blaze of sparks I saw Grim and Chullunder Ghose sitting side by side staring at two other men whose faces were in shadow.

"There is a greatness," Narayan Singh said in his gruffest voice, putting his arms under my shoulders. "Will your honor try it? This is something manlier than death in the dark."

He hove me to my feet, half-smothered me in blankets and helped me to a place beside the fire near Grim, where he heaped loads for me to lean against. Grim merely glanced at me; his whole attention was fixed on the two who sat facing him, of whom one surely was the owner of the cave,—a hermit, at the first glance.

He was muscular, hairy, unwashed, clad in goatskins and rags, with a beard that came down to his navel and a yard of bronze hair matted up with grease. Lice crawled through the dense hair on his arms. His feet were bare, and he had lost three toes, apparently from frostbite. He appeared to like the lice; he did not scratch himself. His eyes were insolently daring—red-rimmed from the bitter wood smoke; age, anything from fifty or sixty onward. He appeared well fed and active, but was sitting stock still, scarcely seeming to breathe and not moving so much as an eyelash.

The other seemed quite out of place in the cave. He was tall and dressed handsomely in an embroidered smock, a turban of dark-purple silk and an almost gorgeous quilted coat whose color was indeterminable, though it looked rich in the gloom. His feet were bare, but there were long boots on the floor of the cave beside him, and he had laid aside a heavy yak-skin overcoat that appeared to have jeweled clasps (at any rate, the firelight shone on what looked like jewels where the fastenings should be).

He resembled no Tibetan I had ever seen, looking more like a Rajput, though his beard was neither curled nor parted in the middle. He had almost classically perfect features, with a broad, smooth forehead and eyes of a dark sky-blue color that would have attracted attention anywhere instantly and held it as long as he pleased.

There were other noticeable things about him: on the middle finger of his right hand was a gold ring that covered the whole joint; it was carved with symbols and resembled the one that Lhaten wore. He had a necklace of small gold beads that descended inside his smock. Around his waist there was a tasseled cord of several colors interwoven.

Apart from his eyes and his dress the most remarkable

thing about him was his cleanliness, which was all the more apparent since he sat so close to the abominably dirty hermit. He sat bolt upright on a clean mat, which he presumably had brought with him, but gave the impression, none the less, of being comfortable and entirely at his ease; and he appeared to have the gift peculiar to men of wide experience and seasoned character, of making strangers feel at ease as well.

He smiled as his eyes met mine. It was a smile remarkably like Grim's, in that it had no faintest trace of sneer, and made you like him, though you felt that he was seeing through you.

"If you had been less muscular," he said, "you might have been less difficult to drag back from that long sleep you were contemplating. However, I won the tug-of-war. Do you forgive me?"

"No," I said.

His eyes laughed but Chullunder Ghose, in panic, hurled rebuke at me.

"Such graceless speech! Oh Rammy sahib, this babu eats shame! 'Blow, blow, thou winter wind. Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude'!"

I felt too weak to argue but my mind was clear. When a man asks my forgiveness I suspect him of intentions on my peace or pocketbook. Forgiveness is stark impertinence. No man has any right to insult another with impudent suggestions of superiority. None with any manhood in him wants to die before his time, and if it were true that this man had pulled me back to life, why should he apologize?

"I see we think alike on that point," said the stranger. "I am glad I came."

"Who are you?" I asked, wondering how he had read my thoughts.

"If you wish, you may call me Rao Singh."

Grim leaned toward me and whispered, his lips hardly moving:

"Lhaten's guru!"*

As I spoke a man's shape seemed to condense out of the darkness. Lhaten, seated on a mat behind Rao Singh, moved and the shadows reswallowed him.

"You will be well enough in a few days to continue your journey," said Rao Singh. "What is your purpose?"

"To rescue Rait," I answered.

"Rait made his own bed. Shall he not lie in it?" he asked.

"Did you help me," I retorted, "or didn't you?"

"I have helped you in a very little matter," he said calmly.

*Guru—a teacher.

"You were merely permitting yourself to die of wounds before your time. If you had done what Rait did, I could no more have helped you than I could delay the coming of the night."

When a man is just beginning to recover from the jaws of death his horizon, in the concrete sense, may be extremely limited; but what he does see, he sees definitely. I had made up my mind to rescue Rait, so it was no use arguing the point.

"We've burned our bridges," Grim remarked.

"That is true," said Rao Singh. "But how do you know it? Does it not appear to you that others burned them for you?"

Chullunder Ghose piped up, in the tone of voice that a shop clerk uses to a rich American, suggesting all the implications of envy, cupidity, artfulness and will to have the better of a bargain.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "And now Sri Rao Singh Bahadur will unfold to us a mystery!"

"I will not," Rao Singh retorted.

For a while we sat still, and I remember I studied our visitor's eyes, whose blue was like nothing I had ever seen before, except perhaps lake water in the hills in spring. They were incongruous. If he had been a Scandinavian they would still have excited comment.

"You are something like young birds who peck at the shell of the egg from within," he remarked after several minutes' silence. "For you to say what you will do when you emerge is to talk of what you don't know and can't possibly understand. Remember this: there is a time, after birds have emerged from the egg, when they have to be cared for and fed and protected. Later they are taught to fly. Then they neither return to the nest nor do they act any longer as fledglings."

He looked frankly and long at Narayan Singh, our Sikh returning the stare, lips parted, as if he were having his fortune told.

"Eggs opened with the knife don't hatch," he said at last.

The Sikh did not wince. His answering voice rang manfully:

"Can I undo what I have done?"

"Not in this life."

"Shall an old horse learn new paces?"

"He who takes the sword—and weakens—might as well slay himself and have done with it," said Rao Singh. "There is no merit in sheathing the sword from fear of consequences, nor any victory worth winning by that means. The thing is to be whole-hearted. There is virtue in whole-

heartedness. A sword is a merciful thing as compared to a slandering tongue."

"And me?" Chullunder Ghose asked—meekly, but with excitement that made his brown eyes glitter.

Rao Singh looked at him for at least a minute without blinking, until the babu had to let his breath out with a noisy gasp.

"A stream," said Rao Singh, "that seems to have no goal but trickles here and there will reach the ocean finally."

"Sri Rao Singh Bahadur, think again!" said that babu hoarsely. "Truly I have wandered here and there. What am I but a babu—failed B. A.? Should I have sat down and have said 'yes, sahib, yes, sahib' to every alien Jack-in-office who could order me, because he had a white skin, without knowing the thousandth part of what I know? Should I have said 'yes, sahib' to the hypocrites and 'yes, sahib' to the fools and 'yes, sahib' to the men who grow rich while I am supposed to be grateful to them for the right to swallow the dust they make? Do you do that? Do you say 'yes, indeed, brother' to the hypocrites who cry that all's well because their pockets are well filled? Would you have me fool myself into stagnation until I rot like all the rest of them?

"I have brains, have I not? A belly, haven't I? Eyes? Ears? Wife and children? Do I feel less—do I deceive myself more—than the men who expect me to blink at their stupidities and say 'salaam' to them? Sri Rao Singh Bahadur, have I ever had one chance until I seized this one and tricked these two sahibs into taking me along with them? Tricked them—but was it a trick? And how much of a trick? Did I deceive them? They who know me for an honest scoundrel, who have never cheated any man, who treated me as they have treated me. That Sikh—he would die for anyone he loves. Me—I would live, that I may enjoy my friends! Death, sahib, comes to us all too frequently! And is it my fault that the world is no oyster for a failed B. A. with a brown skin and no capacity to be a hypocrite?"

"It is the fault of your karma,"* said Rao Singh. "You have merit."

"What is merit to me, if I have no hope?" the babu answered. "Sri Rao Singh Bahadur, I despise a merit that is useless!"

"Put it to use then."

"Will you help us?" Grim asked suddenly.

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*The law of Cause and Effect, which provides exact reward and retribution.

There was another pause while Rao Singh looked steadily at Grim's eyes.

"Better to be a dupe," he said at last, "than to put to a test him on whose help you rely. If I should say I shall help you, then you might say afterward that I have not helped, because you know nothing about the methods I would use. The surgeon's knife helps, but the victim cries out bitterly. And if I should say I would help you, would you not try to take advantage of the promise? That is human nature. You would certainly rely on me instead of using all your own ability—whereas it is only when you have put forth absolutely all your own ability that I can help you in the least."

Grim seemed to have at least an inkling who this extraordinary individual was, but I only knew he was Lhaten's guru, which was shallow information. India is full of gurus who amount to nothing—teachers of penny philosophy based on superstition and tradition learned at second-hand from mistranslated text books. True, he spoke English perfectly, and without any of the phrases that the ordinary gurus use to veil their ignorance. He did not show off. He was neither arrogant nor too persuasive. Still——

"Will you help us to rescue Rait?" I asked.

"No," he said, and that blunt answer did more to convince me he was somebody than if he had spent hours explaining to me who he was and why I should show him respect.

"Do you know where Rait is?" I demanded, but he did not answer that question.

"Listen," I said. "Rait writes he is in a dungeon undergoing torture. If it is true you came to keep me from dying of knife wounds, why can't you at least help me to rescue that poor fellow from much worse than physical torture?"

"Are you sure Rait wrote?" he asked.

"I have his letter."

I was wrong. Grim had both Rait's letters. He produced them, holding them toward the firelight.

"Why not burn them?" Rao Singh suggested.

Again there was at least a minute's silence. The old hermit, who seemed to read silence as other men understand speech, leaned forward and put fuel on the fire. Grim folded the letters, in doubt what to do with them.

"Why burn them?" I asked.

Rao Singh, without moving his head, contrived in some way to summon Lhaten from the gloom behind him.

"Tell why," he ordered.

"Because he has suggested that you should," said Lhaten. "Also because evil communications are a link that dugpas use too easily. As disease seeks dirt, malevolence——"

"You have already told too much," said Rao Singh, and Lhaten retired to the gloom where he became invisible.

"If I burn them——" Grim began.

"You will do so on your own responsibility. I make no bargains," Rao Singh interrupted.

Chullunder Ghose began to plead with Grim to burn them, throwing a handkerchief from hand to hand—a way he had when he was more than usually nervous.

"Sahib, you don't know what great things hinge on little ones sometimes! A little flea from a rat's tail carries plague. The color of——"

He ceased because he saw Grim was not listening. In his own mind, in his own way, Grim was working out the problem for himself. He glanced at me at last. I nodded, always choosing to agree with him and back him to the finish when he works his eyebrows that way. I have known him to decide wrongly—possibly more times than I could count offhand; but half the fun of life, to my mind, lies in going the whole distance when you give a man your confidence. Mistakes don't matter; it is arguing about them that rots friendship.

Grim burned the letters, poking them into the fire with a stick.

"Why did you do it?" Rao Singh asked.

"They were of no use, and I want to see what will happen next," Grim answered. "Ramsden and I are determined to rescue Rait. Those two letters can't make any difference."

"No?"

Rao Singh stood up, and Lhaten held his cloak for him to find his way into the sleeves. Then he turned his back to us and Lhaten buttoned it, but that may have been a move to mask an exchange of whispers.

Grim and the others, the hermit included, all rose to their feet, but I had to sit still, being too weak to rise without help. Rao Singh came and looked at me, smiling, and I noticed that his clothing smelled of sandalwood. His hands and face were as clean as if he had come that minute from the bath.

"You all but escaped out of that prison of yours," he said. "Obstinate? I never knew a man so obstinate! Until I learned how strong your friendship is for Jimgrim I was at a loss how to challenge your will."

"Why did you go to the trouble?" I asked.

"Lhaten summoned me—accepting the responsibility," he added, glancing at his chela.

"If there is anything I can do," I said, "at any time to——"

He interrupted with a gesture of fierce distaste. Then

suddenly he laughed, as if remembering I could not understand his point of view.

"You have established claim on me enough," he said. "A gift might increase it altogether too much. You will not need me again, I think. Stay here until your strength returns."

Then he went with a wave of his hand to the hermit, who behaved like some old janitor in attendance on a gods' ambassador, dividing his emotions equally between scorn for us and pride at having sheltered such a visitor.

With his back toward the entrance, the hermit spoke:

"What has any of you done that you should have this honor?"

How many tongues are spoken in the world? And how many secret orders have their signs of recognition? None the less, I have observed that when two of a kind meet they invariably recognize each other, even though they have no spoken word in common. As a horseman knows a good horse and a true dog knows a huntsman, so a guru recognizes him in whom the seeds of Wisdom are awake.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IN WHICH JIMGRIM MAKES NO BOLDER CLAIM THAN THAT HE AND HIS FRIENDS ARE SAVAGES.

I DON'T pretend to know what method had been used to snatch me out of death's gate. Grim's version of it was that Lhaten came unexpectedly and after he had pulled all my bandages off and examined the wounds, Rao Singh came unannounced.

Rao Singh, after hardly a glance at me, had asked to have the loads piled so as to make a sort of inner chamber; and behind that barrier he and Lhaten worked over me for half-an-hour; but in what way they had worked, none knew.

I do know that from that hour my recovery began, and it was rapid. There was a new sensation of vitality—the sort of feeling that a man has on an early summer morning after a good night's sleep. Nothing—not even pain and stiffness—could convince me I was in the slightest danger of relapse and my friends had hard work to keep me from taking too much exercise, until Narayan Singh at last pronounced an ultimatum.

"Sahib," he said, "when we wrestled at Benjamin's you had the best of it. By the five vows of a Sikh and on my honor, I shall take my vengeance now unless you lie still!"

And now it appeared that the secret route into Tibet was not entirely free from toll, although the lousy old hermit refused even to look at money or to help himself from our provisions. Day after day I was left alone with him while my friends, armed with hatchets, took the ponies down into a near-by valley to cut tamarisk for fire-wood, which they brought into a cave near by for the hermit's future use. That seemed to be the customary task imposed on all rare visitors who used the secret trail, and in return we were entitled to be guided as far as the next, else undiscoverable, halting place. There was no fixed minimum of fuel to be cut, nor any limit to the quantity, so my companions filled the storage

cave, the hermit neither thanking them nor appearing to take the slightest interest.

He himself lived on infinitesimal rations of barley which he roasted on an old iron shovel and ate cold, counting it grain by grain. He appeared disgusted at our appetites, and at his rate of consumpton he had enough barley stored in two sacks to last him an immeasurable time. But he had none to spare for our ponies, nor would he tell us where we might obtain any. In fact, he would tell us nothing, except that he was ready to act as guide whenever we should choose to move on, his conversation being limited to that and to assertions that Tibetan lamas were a lot of frauds. He appeared to believe we were going to Lhassa, and to regard us as a pack of fools for that sufficient reason.

During the ten days that we occupied his cave I never saw him pray or do anything that suggested a religious exercise. He would sit by the hour on a rock, well sheltered from the wind outside the entrance of the cave, his red-rimmed eyes fixed on the skyline and an expression on his face as if he were listening to sounds that none of us could hear. He appeared to have no regular hours for "listening in" (if that is what he did). Sometimes he got up from his litter of dry moss and branches in the middle of the night when a gale was raging, and sat on his rock until dawn. At other times, when he was cooking barley or carrying firewood from the storage cave, he would suddenly drop what he was doing, as if he had heard a signal, and would hurry to the rock and sit there motionless, perhaps for a few minutes, or for hours.

Yet his hearing was not particularly keen. If anything, he seemed inclined to deafness, due to the terrific pressure of the wind and perhaps, too, to accumulations in his ears of wax and extraneous filth. And it did not seem to make the slightest difference to him how much noise we made when he was concentrating on his strange task. We could sit around the rock, laughing and talking within two yards, without disturbing him in the least.

We were in haste to be off because the grain for the ponies was running short, so we left before I had fully recovered, starting one morning as soon as daylight had crept midway down into the valley over which the ledge in front of the cave mouth hung like an eagle's eerie. The old hermit stowed a dozen grains of barley in his cheek and led the way on foot without a word of comment, setting such a pace as gave the loaded ponies hard work to keep up with him, scrambling as they had to, up and down a narrow trail that would have made even mountain sheep look to their laurels.

Above us the ice hung from the ledges. Beneath us more

often than not was a drop of a sheer half a mile through an amethyst void to the rocks in the bed of a frozen water course. At times the loaded ponies had to lean outward over a precipice to the point where equilibrium almost vanished in order to feel their way around a projecting spur. Wherever the trail was level for a few yards there was ice or frozen snow as slippery as glass, and we grew used to riding with a left leg over nothing while the pony picked his way along the loose rim of infinity.

To have found that trail with the aid of a map and instruments would have been a task to baffle survey engineers. The way the hermit followed it, not hesitating except to pause, leaning into the wind on some naked crag upreared against the sky to let us overtake him, was a miracle as great as any I have witnessed.

There were places where we had to lift the ponies in the bight of a sling around their rumps, all four of us hauling together and the ponies digging toes into whatever cracks their scrambling hoofs could find. The hermit never lent a hand but merely stood and watched us scornfully.

He looked more than ever scornful when we called a halt for a meal and to rest the animals—he sticking his tongue in his cheek to transfer one lone grain of roasted barley, which he chewed for as long as it took me to eat a substantial meal of canned army rations.

Whoever mapped out stages on that secret route was, like our hermit guide, a seven-league-booted individual. Or possibly the gods, to whom Chullunder Ghose attributed all circumstances that he did not understand, had set the distances—forgetful that mere humans and their ponies had to crawl like tired ants over mountains from one valley to the next. It was dusk, and the gorges were purple with echoing gloom when we sighted smoke among crags on a ledge in the distance. It was pitch dark, starless, with the bellies of black clouds descending on us in a noise of volleying wind, when we rode at last into a great, wide, slot-shaped cavern mouth, from which a maze of passages led into a limestone mountain.

Here we were met by a woman who looked like a man, with a leather shirt hiding her dry dugs and a mass of wind-blown gray hair framing a face like a fury's. The sinews of her naked, bronzed legs were like whipcord and the muscles of her arms looked capable of war with the rocks for weapons. Yet she was as peaceful as she seemed belligerent.

Her age was beyond guessing, though she moved with the agility of youth, swinging herself from the loins as she strode down a passage in front of us, whirling a torch made of

resinous wood. She had nothing to say. Our old guide found his tongue and interrupted the gestures she made with the flaring torch, she standing at the entrance of a cave where he explained we were to leave the ponies. There was no light in there, but she followed, after we had felt our way in darkness over horse dung ages old, and when we began off-loading the ponies she passed her torch to our hermit guide and lent a hand so masterfully that Chullunder Ghose stood back and watched her.

Then she spoke at last in vowelly, musical Pushtu, mocking the babu, calling him "fat Chenresi."

"Mother of a million virgins," he retorted, "I, who have known many women, marvel! I will be Chenresi and remain forever, if you will be high priestess and do all the hard work!"

. . She seemed to have taken a sudden fancy to him, flashing smiles that showed astonishingly perfect yellow teeth. But when she smiled she looked a thousand years old, because her face broke into deep, criss-crossed wrinkles, that all vanished when the smile was gone.

She resumed her torch and led the way out of the cave when we had fed the ponies, taking no notice of our guide except to nod to him when he turned to the left in the passage and went off alone toward the entrance.

We could hear that the storm had burst. There was a din among the crags outside as if whole mountains were being torn up by the wind. No siege guns ever made more cannonade than that. Hail like the rattle of musketry shattered itself into glassy splinters on the cavern threshold; and through a fissure in the rock wall the wind screamed like the artillery shells in Flanders. Yet our old guide walked toward the entrance as if nothing in the world were wrong.

Grim remonstrated, hesitating when the woman beckoned to us with the torch to follow her.

"You will let him go out into that?" he objected.

She laughed, with a flash of her eye teeth that suggested scorn.

"Does duty cease because of wind and snow?" she asked. "And are you in authority here?"

She led along the passage past a dozen openings that echoed to the tumult of the storm, then turned a hair-pin corner suddenly and began to descend stairs hewn out of the rock—enormous stairs, each six or eight feet from front to rear, irregularly spaced.

Presently she beat the torch out and we saw a dim light down below us and a long way off. Its dimness was peculiar, suggesting an electric arc light seen through milky mist, and

there were strange shapes like the branches of trees in a nightmare forest that kept changing, and changing their color too, as we drew nearer.

I was last. Grim, next to the woman, felt his way with his hand on the wall, we treading in his footsteps because the edges of the stairs were shadowy and irregular.

"By gad—ice!" he called back. And then: "No—stalactites!"

It was growing noticeably warmer as we kept descending into light that steadily increased. And presently the sound of voices came toward us, like the far-off murmur of a crowd, reminding me of the dull roar at a race course when the race is on and the crowd leans staring down the course.

But when we turned a sudden corner between gleaming stalactites the scene resembled nothing I had ever seen or expect to see again. Down three steps was a gallery of solid stalagmite that overhung an oval cavern, whose walls, floor, domed roof and a maze of feathery, fantastic columns all were opal-colored, gleaming in the light reflected from a dozen braziers and from a log fire set nearly in the midst.

Around the fire a dozen men were seated, talking and as dignified as owls. It was their quiet voices that had come rumbling up the stairway like the clamor of a crowd. Three or four of them appeared to be Tibetans but the others were of various Eastern races, and they were of all ages from about forty years old upward.

There was not one visible inch of all that cavern uncovered by calcium carbonate that had percolated through the limestone roof for countless centuries and finally ceased dripping, leaving the cavern dry and lovelier than fairy land. It looked like a lacquer of mother o' pearl, for there was color in the stuff—rose, blue, green, yellow—blending into iridescence as it caught reflected firelight.

At the end of the cavern facing us, in a shallow domed recess proportioned perfectly to the dimensions of the cavern, sat three images that had been carved out of the rock. Those, too, were covered with the lacquer-like ooze, as evenly and perfectly as if the overlay were done by hand. The images were double life size, squatting crosslegged in the Buddhist attitude of meditation, and the one in the center suggested Chenresi—in the way that the moon, perhaps, suggests an arc light.

The perfection of that carving was so marvelous (the figure in the midst particularly) that neither Grim nor I could take our eyes off it. It seemed almost to breathe, as if the artist's hand had caught the unseen spirit with the flesh and fashioned its resemblance in the stone. Calm, dignified,

benevolent, aware of all immensity, it meditated on man's relation to the universe; and those on either side sat comprehending what the central image thought.

There was so much wisdom symbolized on the central figure's face, and so much alert intelligence on the faces of the other two, that the impulse was to creep toward them silently and sit and listen. None of us spoke for I don't know how many minutes, although the men around the fire continued talking, their voices booming and rumbling.

"They can't be Buddhist carvings," Grim said at last. "It took a hundred thousand years to form this stuff."

He touched the stalagmitic covering of the gallery with his finger. It was as smooth as if hand polished.

The woman laughed, perhaps at our amazement, and beckoned us to follow her down hewn steps, covered with the same smooth, ice-hard lacquer, to the cavern floor. They were slippery; and it was clear that once they had been worn in ruts by human feet. But by some unguessable alchemy the ruts had been refilled with the stalagmitic stuff, restoring the perfect squareness of the hewn blocks.

None took the slightest notice of us as the woman led the way across the floor toward those images. The men who sat around the fire continued talking. Nor did she appear to feel much reverence for the images. She approached them with an air of amusement, pointing at the one in the midst, then turning to laugh at Chullunder Ghose.

"Fat Chenresi!" she exclaimed.

Barring that our babu had a full week's growth of curling, coarse, black whiskers, the superficial likeness was amazing, even to the broad, strong shoulders, and the well-filled paunch. There was the same majestic forehead, the same contemplative calmness of the eyes, the full, well-rounded head and width between the ears. The babu had it all, except the costume and the dignity.

He laughed, uncomfortably conscious of the difference, and tried to hide confusion with a jest:

"Yes, I sat for the portrait. Does it do me justice?"

Grim touched the woman's arms. "But *is* that Chenresi?" he demanded. He had been examining the image. The surface of the stone had cracked with age, the way dry cheese does, and the stalagmitic substance had come later, filling the cracks and preserving the whole.

"Are you your grandfather?" she retorted. Then she pointed at the oldest man who sat a little apart from the others within the circle of the firelight. "Ask him," she suggested.

She led the way toward the fire, we following in a rather diffident group since we seemed to be interrupting earnest

conversation that was no concern of ours. But that oldest man looked up and glanced at us as if he knew why we had come, and who we were.

"Have they washed? Have they eaten?" he asked in Pushtu.

The woman made no answer but beckoned us to follow her to an opening under the gallery by which we had entered. It was a natural break in the wall of the cavern that had been trimmed into a keyhole arch shape and then subsequently covered with the pearly stalagmitic stuff. It led into a cave in which one lamp was burning above a deep trough through which about two feet of water flowed. The sides of the cave were moist from the warmth of the water, which was slightly more than body heat.

We got into that trough and wallowed. It was the first bath we had had for weeks. The feel of good clean water on my healing wounds was like a taste of paradise, and the water was faintly sulphurous, which may or may not be advised in the medical text books as a remedy for stabs and saddle sores, but which made me feel as if my injuries had never happened.

There was room for us all in the trough and to spare; there would have been room for another half-dozen of us; and we fooled and splashed like youngsters until the woman's voice drew our attention to the fact that somebody had mentioned food. It was then, but not until then, that we realized that she had stood and watched us all the time, leaning with one hand on the keyhole arch by which we entered.

Grim called her "mother," I suppose to restore his self-possession, and since we never learned her name the title stuck to her, she accepting it without comment and adopting the rôle more or less. For instance, she came and examined my wounds, making me keep turning in the lamplight, and when she had satisfied herself she went and brought washed gauzy stuff for bandages which she tore into strips and helped me to tie on. She also brought some fleeces to be used as towels, laughing because we had to put on filthy clothing over clean skins.

Then she led us to another cave, gloomy, and full of sound because the wind was whistling through a tunnel overhead. There was hot boiled barley ready for us in enameled iron bowls, with iron spoons that looked like shovels; and tea in the Tibetan style, containing salt, and butter made from yak milk, which is not so bad when you are used to it. The while we ate she watched us as if eating were a loathsome ritual indulged in only by the ignorant. Nevertheless, she brought us

second helpings from some sort of pantry at the end of a dark passage, where a man's voice like an ogre's greeted her each time she entered.

When we had eaten our fill at last she led us back to the main cavern, where the group was still in conversation around the blazing fire. She gestured at the fire and grinned at us.

"Wood—wood—we shall need wood in the morning!" she remarked. "Snow—snow—snow—you will have to dig for it!"

The oldest man, whose mat was a little apart from the others, rebuked her for the speech and motioned to us to be seated in a group together on his right hand where there was a wide gap in the circle. So we sat down on the polished floor, which was neither warm nor comfortable—"like a missionary's heaven," as Grim whispered through the corner of his mouth. But the woman fetched the fleeces on which we had dried ourselves, so we squatted on those and felt less like paupers at a rich man's entertainment.

"You are welcome," said he who had rebuked the woman, and the softly voweled Hindi that he used suggested even more than friendliness. He was another who had the gift of putting strangers instantly at ease.

I have called him the oldest man in that strange gathering, and so undoubtedly he was. But under scrutiny his face had the appearance of undying youth. There were no wrinkles; his short neat beard was black and so was as much of his hair as we could see under the edge of his brown turban. His teeth were regular, well kept and white. He sat bolt-upright, bearing his weight from the loins with the grace of an athlete. His hands were strong, firm, young looking and, though obviously used to exercise, well kept, with clean, unbroken nails.

He wore a gold bead necklace tucked into the bosom of a brown smock, and a ring on his middle finger like those that Rao Singh and Lhaten wore. His cloak was of dark brown homespun, unembroidered. He had noticeably brown eyes, large and well spaced. It was only they, on scrutiny, that hinted at his age; they looked so much too wise to be a young man's.

Yet—if one looked away from him, and looked back suddenly, one wondered that a man so old as he could sit up straight and talk—or even live! There was age, not skin-deep, on his surface, like an eggshell only more transparent; and within was not exactly youth but a maturity that had refused to grow old.

"You like this place?" he asked. "You wonder at it?" And

we all made affirmations of amazement—asinine remarks, attempting to find adjectives that should describe the indescribable, like four fool tourists looking at the Taj Mahal. Grim was the first to begin to talk sense:

"When I asked just now whether that is an image of Chenresi, I was asked in return whether I am my own grandfather. Would you care to explain?"

The man smiled. "They call you Jimgrim, I am told. Men give you a good reputation. I am not surprised at that. Chenresi, as known nowadays, is a Lamaistic legend—to all intents and purposes a god who is worshipped by ignorant monks. What you see over there is the symbol that men carved, quite a number of thousands of years before Gautama taught certain spiritual truths. From that original men took the pattern for Chenresi's image, continually multiplying copies of it, each more imperfect than the last, and finally forgetting the very existence of the original."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him how he knew Grim's name, but before I could speak he himself asked a question, which I answered before Grim could get a word in.

"Why are you here?" he demanded.

"We are on our way to rescue a man named Rait, who is in the hands of people who have been described to us as dugpas," I said, "but we don't know where he is nor how to get to him."

Some of the younger men who sat within the zone of firelight laughed at that, in the way that schoolboys snicker in class when a newcomer makes a mistake. He looked at them one by one and they grew immediately silent.

"If he were on the moon would you try to rescue him?"

"But he isn't on the moon," I objected.

"And moreover, I am good at killing dugpas," said Narayan Singh.

"My son, that is the dugpa fallacy," he answered, giving the Sikh a friendly look. "Dugpas seek to smother thought by killing those who dare to think. Do you think you can cause crime to cease by killing dugpas?"

"I can reduce the number of those who practise black arts," the Sikh retorted.

"As, for instance, you would lengthen day by killing those who stay awake at night?"

Chullunder Ghose began to scratch his stomach—the invariable prelude to a poser.

"Yes," he said, "but do we let men who have dangerous diseases walk at large? How shall we protect ourselves?"

"You avoid disease by living in accordance with the laws of health, which are beginning to be slightly understood. And

if you live otherwise you are at the mercy of those agencies that spread disease, whether you are aware of them or not. In the same way, you are at the mercy of dugpas unless you live in such a way that dugpas cannot possibly manipulate your thought."

"Father of Conundrums! How shall one learn to do that?" wondered Grim.

There was a chuckle all round the circle, and then silence. He whom Grim addressed as Father of Conundrums stared into the fire and seemed to search for phrases that might mean something to men unused to his philosophy, until the woman threw fuel on the embers with a crash that startled us and summoned him from reverie.

"You of the West are mechanical," he said. "You think in terms of engines. Very well. Let us say one of you wishes to solve a transportation problem. You desire to invent a machine that shall lessen distances. Yet you are ignorant. How long then would you think it reasonable first to study the mechanics of your problem—all the laws of friction, electricity, contraction and expansion, dynamics, metallurgy—and so on? Would you attempt to invent, let us say, an airplane without first studying those laws? And could you learn enough for a beginning, say, in half a lifetime? Nevertheless, you seem to expect me to explain in fifteen minutes how to avoid the malevolence of dugpas, concerning which you are almost entirely ignorant, and how to——" He paused. "What else is it you wish to do?"

"To reach Sham-bha-la," said Grim, "after rescuing Rait."

"After doing the impossible, to reach a place whose very existence you can't prove, and concerning the nature of which you know nothing! All this you wish me to tell you in fifteen minutes."

Grim smiled. "We have until morning," he suggested amiably.

He whom Grim had called the Father of Conundrums bowed ironically. Then he indicated with a gesture all those seated in a circle around the fire.

"These, too, seek what you seek," he remarked. "Observe them. Are they young? Observe her." (He signified the woman with a nod and a dry glance at her.) "She was a married woman, mother of three children whom she raised to manhood. Then her husband died and she went forth as a *sanyassin*,* wandering all over India, seeking the way, for I forget how many years. Thereafter for what some would think a lifetime she endured austerities in a nunnery of which

*Wandering religious beggar.

you have never heard. And now she has come this far, but no farther." His eyes swept the circle again as he paused. "Not one of these," he went on, "but has sought at least for twenty years what you are seeking. Thus far only, they have come. And I tell you, they will have to go forth and do what they know, before they can go one step farther. You believe I can instruct you fully before morning?"

"You can try," said Grim. "I think you can do more than you would like me to believe."

Chullunder Ghose, rocking himself with excitement, leaped at the breach that he thought Grim had made in the wall of obscurity:

"Surely you can do more! Let me see one evidence of power—great, wise Guru that I know you are—and I shall submit myself, performing all that is required!"

"You would reward me for an exhibition? Is that it? Do you think I wish to buy your submission?"

"Set me a test then! What shall I do to persuade you to accept me as your chela?" asked Chullunder Ghose. A sort of revivalist fervor had seized him.

"Serve those well in whose service you are!" was the answer, prompt and unequivocal.

The babu bowed his head and sighed like a punctured rubber tire. Grim, twitching his eyebrows, picked up the thread of his argument. He knew, as I confess I did not, something of what was required of him before he might expect plain answers to his questions.

"We are men who have no claims on us," he said, "and we are bent on a definite goal."

"Is it definite? How definite?" the other asked.

"This much," said Grim, "that we're willing to die if we fail. We're going forward. We intend to rescue Rait, and we intend to find Sham-bha-la. You—I don't know who you are—convince me—though I don't know how—that you can help us if you wish. You knew my name without my telling you. Therefore, I'm sure you've had word from Lhaten in some way, and that Lhaten told you all about us before we got here. It's also clear enough that you wished to see us, or you wouldn't have been here when we came. Furthermore, there was no need to admit us into this wonderful place. We should never have known of its existence unless the woman had brought us down here, and I don't doubt that she did it by your orders. That convinces me that either Lhaten, or else the more mysterious Rao Singh who came to the cave and cured my friend Ramsden, has told you we're fit to be trusted. It's as plain as this hand before my face that you can read me as I have often had to read the savages I've dealt

with in the way of duty, only I don't doubt you do it better; probably incomparably better. Savages have often come to me and told me to do my duty and help them because I knew more than they did. I never refused, although I always helped them in my own way, which was frequently successful and occasionally not. I may seem like a savage to you, but you appear to me to know a great deal and it doesn't make any difference to me how long this circle of chelas has been seeking what I only recently began to seek. I have been busy in my own way. So has Ramsden. So have Chullunder Ghose and Narayan Singh. They're friends of mine, and I don't pick friends at random. I can guarantee them. You may say we're just four savages who have reached this place together. And speaking as a savage, I say to you, Do your duty! You know what it is."

That was the longest speech I ever heard Grim make. Its effect was magical. The Father of Conundrums (to this day I have not learned his name) stood up and bowed to Grim.

"I recognize you," he said simply.

All the chelas in the circle rose and looked at Grim with studied curiosity. Some of them smiled, but the majority received the news in silence. The old woman came and, thrusting herself between me and Grim, put over his shoulders her own necklace made of dried red berries. Then she threw more fuel on the fire until the sparks rose in a shower to the roof and the whole cavern glistened and shimmered like mother o' pearl, in the dew of a midsummer morning.

Consider this, my son: this earth-life is a little time, of which a third is spent asleep. What went before it, and what cometh after, are a long time—verily a time too long for measurement. Shall we be of the herd who say that dreams are a delusion because waking we cannot interpret them in terms of common speech? Or shall we, rather than pretend to have more knowledge than the gods, admit that possibly some dreams may link us with that universe from which we came into a temporary world, and into which we must inevitably yield ourselves again? Some dreams are memories, it may be, of experience gained in the infinity of time before the world was. And the wisest—aye, the very wisest of us—is he altogether sure that all earth-life is not a dream?

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

JEFF RAMSDEN'S DREAM.

EMOTIONS are not easy to explain in writing. Here, in this draughty cave, where the paper flutters and the ink is freezing, even memory does not function properly. I have to keep warming my fingers by flapping my arms in the way old London cabmen used to do on frosty mornings, and in the intervals it is not easy to recall sensations that occurred a month ago. So much has happened since.

I remember Grim's face. I remember that once, in Jerusalem, when a high commissioner had sent for him to thank him privately for secret public service that undoubtedly had saved the Near East from a holy war of Moslem against Jew and Christian, he had come out smiling in exactly the same way. Someone had touched the concealed, inner core of his manhood.

Now he stood still, looking straight into the eyes of the old guru, whom he had called Father of Conundrums. Guru is a desecrated word; I use it for lack of another to describe the man whose slowly spoken phrase "I recognize you" opened a door, as it were, through which Grim stepped, and closed the same door in the faces of Narayan Singh, Chullunder Ghose and me.

We were the same men, standing on the same pearl-colored floor of stalagmite. No word, not a gesture of Grim's so much as hinted at a change in our relationship. The only way I can suggest the feeling I experienced is to say that it may be a woman who sees a better-looking woman speaking to her husband, feels as I did then. I don't know. But it may be.

Chullunder Ghose was jealous and gave tongue:

"Is it not enough that white men should have stolen India? Shall they rob us also of our heritage in spiritual things? Why am I unrecognized?"

"You are better fitted to cheat pilgrims at Benares!" growled Narayan Singh.

"You—you will die with a sword in your back!" said the babu.

I expected anything to happen, except what actually did. The chelas formed a circle around Grim and the old guru, excluding us three and the woman, who took me by the arm and fairly drove Chullunder Ghose along in front of her, he arguing like a pot-bellied bunnia who has lost a lawsuit. Narayan Singh strode gloomily behind us, muttering to himself.

The woman led us up over the gallery into a dark cavern in which empty barley bags and sheepskins had been piled for use as beds. She found an ordinary box of safety matches and lit half a dozen butter lamps in niches in the wall, which instantly brought great, carved, staring, seated figures out of the surrounding gloom—solemn, serene and majestic, like a conference of prehistoric gods. It was hard to believe that they did not move and were not breathing. She set her box of matches on the lap of one of them.

It looked as if the chamber were prepared for us. There were three cups, three earthen jars of drinking water, three pairs of heavy blankets thrown on three of the heaps of bedding.

"You should not talk. You should sleep," the woman told us and immediately sat down on a sheepskin by the entrance.

We wanted to ask questions but she shook her head until the gray mane blew out horizontally, then laid a gnarled old finger on her lips. Thereafter, gradually, as if she let her muscles find their proper relaxation one by one, she fell into the attitude in which those images were carved and stayed there motionless as if she herself were hewn out of the rock.

Chullunder Ghose sighed despondently and rolled himself on to a heap of sheepskins, pulling up the blankets over him and belching in the way that Hindus do before they sleep.

"So this is hope!" he grumbled. "Taste it—and it is snatched away at once! That is always my luck. Jimgrim goes forward alone, and we three will be sent back—take my word for it! I should say, let us go and join the dugpas, if I weren't afraid of them!"

"I go where Jimgrim goes!" announced Narayan Singh. "Whoever can turn me back will have to be a good one! Let us sleep while we may. In the morning Jimgrim will be tired—aye, as a young recruit is tired after his first week on the drill ground—only more! It may be he will need our strength. Let the hag keep watch."

He fell asleep, as his heavy breathing proved, within five

minutes after he had spoken. Chullunder Ghose began to snore not many minutes afterward. I, too, had a feeling that the woman might be trusted to sit sentinel. Her eyes were open, fixed in meditative calm and she looked as if sleep were no part of her plan for the night. Nevertheless, I made up my mind to stay awake; I had a feeling which worried me, that something in the nature of a crack was opening in the intimacy I had long enjoyed with Grim. It was a vague, uncomfortable feeling. There was no explaining it.

So for a while I sat upright on a heap of sheepskins in between the knees of two of the great carved images and with my back against the wall. It was like sitting in a tomb. The little yellow flames of the butter lamps cast leaping shadows that made the great carved figures seem to move, and when a rat ran over the floor I learned that my nerves were in no respectable condition. It was a big rat, but it had no right to startle me in that way. The old woman took no notice of it.

Then the wall grew cold against my back, so I used the blankets; and I had no sooner draped them over my shoulders than I felt an irresistible weight over my eyelids. It was not unnatural; a long march on the first day after convalescence, followed by a hot bath and a full meal could hardly have helped but produce that effect, though I fought it, even forcing my eyelids open with my fingers.

It was not very long, I suppose, before sleep overcame me and I slipped into a dream, so realistic that every single detail of it stands out clear in memory. In the dream I was sitting on that heap of bedding, trying to force myself to stay awake and watching the old woman by the entrance, wondering how she had learned that trick of concentration with her eyes wide open, and what good it did her. I particularly remember I could hear the snoring of Chullunder Ghose.

All at once, silently, in came the man with the savagely masculine features and the womanly black hair, who had sent me reeling backward in Sidiki ben Mahommed's house. He took no notice of the woman, and she none of him. He came up straight toward where I was sitting and the smile with which he greeted me was of triumph and condescension.

"So you have lost your friend!" he said maliciously.

From first to last throughout the dream my part in it was passive, except insofar as I fought all the while with an intense sleepiness, which I recognized as dangerous. I seemed to be in the power of something that held me speechless and unable to do anything without that individual's permission, although I could hear, see, obey and understand.

"Do you know what they are doing to your friend Grim?" he asked me. "Come and see."

I got off the bed and followed him, still conscious of the old woman, who moved her head slowly to follow us with her gaze, but without once blinking. We went out to the gallery from which we had first entered the main cavern, and there we stood side by side looking down at the men who were torturing Grim.

The fire of rough tamarisk knots had been changed to a circle of flame that appeared to come out of the floor of the cavern and around that, in a wider circle, sat the chelas doing something, I could not see what, that increased the flame's fierceness whenever the old guru spoke to them. The guru was seated outside the circle of chelas on a mat that seemed to have no contact with the floor.

In the midst of the circle of flame stood Grim with his hands tied to a stake behind his back. His face was set like a red Indian's enduring agony, but I saw that he held the cord that tied his wrists in either hand and could release it if he chose.

"That," said the man beside me, "is the way they measure mercy. If he were an ordinary chela they would give him no cord and he would have to depend solely on his will. He will burn unless he stands exactly in the middle of the fire. They roast the weakness out of him. When they've finished with him he will have no human qualities at all and he might just as well be dead."

"Does he love?" asked the voice of the guru.

"He loves!" cried the chelas.

"Burn it out of him!"

They did something that made the wall of flame white-hot and I saw Grim nearly fainting in the midst of it. A cloud that looked like smoke went up and when it vanished he no longer resembled the Grim I had known but had the dried-up look of an ascetic. He looked up through the flame and saw me watching him. His face, it seemed to me, was scornful.

"Does he hope?" asked the voice of the guru.

"He hopes!" cried the chelas.

"Burn it out of him!"

Again the flame grew white-hot and I saw Grim writhe, while he clung with all his might to the cord that held his wrists fast to the stake. Then smoke, in a sudden great cloud as if something had burst; and when it disappeared there was nothing even likable about Grim; he was stern, contemptuous, emotionless, and when he looked toward me it was as if he wondered why he had ever called himself my friend.

"Does he hate?" asked the voice of the guru.

"Now he hates life!" cried the chelas.

"Burn it out of him!"

Again the white-hot ring of flame, and Grim became invisible. The chelas laughed. The man beside me touched me on the shoulder.

"You have lost your friend," he said. "When a man can't hate there is nothing left of him. Now come."

He led me along the gallery toward an opening that was not there when the old woman led us in that evening. We passed through gloom into a clear sharp light in which everything was finely etched, and Rait sat at a table with a board in front of him on which he was moving things that looked like checkers. Somewhere in the distance there was a maze of tangle-foot fly-papers, and sometimes, when he moved a piece on the board a man got caught by the feet. At each move something happened. He appeared to be controlling forces that obliged men to act in this or that way, overwhelming them if they refused.

"This is what Grim missed," said the voice of my guide. "He took the wrong road—into nothingness."

Yet I could see that Rait's game was a losing one. The forces he controlled were taking hold of the men on whom he used them and he had to keep using more and more force to control his victims. I could see him sweating with the effort, his face white with fear; and he could not stop, because the moment he should relax the effort his victims were ready to turn the forces back on him. The thing was horrible. Being a dream, though vivid, the impending cataclysm was beyond the scope of ordinary thought. No words could describe what I saw was coming. My guide screamed, like a wildcat in a trap, and ran to Rait to try to help him with the pieces on the board, moving them swiftly, his eyes glaring; and at each move thousands were obliterated. Then Rait shouted and turned into a monster with fangs and claws, who tried to rend the man who had taken his place at the board. They fought, yelling at each other, as the forces rushed toward them like a returning tide—and I woke up.

Narayan Singh was sitting up and swearing Sikh oaths. Chullunder Ghose was screaming, his head under blankets.

"A bad dream," said Narayan Singh and threw a folded sheepskin at the babu.

Chullunder Ghose sat up and stared at us, and at the shadows playing on the great carved figures.

"Krishna!" he exclaimed. "I had a dream of dugpas! They were showing me how to grow great on stuff to eat that worked like yeast. I was bursting!"

"Indigestion!" said the Sikh. "If you had paid your reckoning by chopping wood, you would have slept like an honest man. I dreamed of war. It was a good game while it lasted but the dead men would not stay dead, and when they came back they had other weapons. Not good."

"What are you men making all that row about?"

It was Grim's voice. He had been sleeping quietly on some bedding heaped not far from mine, with the knees of an image between us. I went to look at him. There was no change that I could see. His face wore the same red Indian smile. There was the same quiet tolerance and resolution in his eyes.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Oh, we sat and talked for an hour or two."

"Nothing else?"

"Why, yes, we smoked—imported cigarettes. We had a good time."

"No initiation?"

"Are you crazy?" he asked. "I yarned about our doings in the Near East and they told me some of the history of these caverns."

"Are you lying?" I asked him.

"No, you old bonehead," he retorted. "When there's anything I don't want to tell, I'll say so."

"Did the guru mention us three?"

"He said you might have an experience. I don't know whether he meant to-night, or when. He wasn't very definite. I vote we sleep; we're moving on at daylight."

"Did he tell you how to reach Rait?"

"No. He remarked you're an elephant, but elephants, he said, go through things rather than around them, and though they sometimes fall into traps in consequence, they have been known to smash the traps. He said an elephant's a foolish beast with streaks of wisdom. Why the devil don't you turn in?"

"What do you suppose he meant by 'an experience'?"

"Darned if I know. Go to bed, and go on dreaming. He said dreams are sometimes tests of character. Go back and dream you're an elephant!"

I returned to the bed and sat there, having had enough of dreams for one night. Grim fell asleep at once. So did Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose, and they lay quietly; but Grim dreamed all night long, as I could tell by the way he twitched and muttered.

And until she arose, and lit a torch, and summoned us to breakfast, that old woman with the gray hair sat beside the

entrance on her mat as motionless as if she had been carved of stone, her eyes fixed on infinity and an expression on her face as if she were listening to sounds none else could hear.

You may be sure of this, my son: that no decision you may take, nor any course, will meet with universal favor. Though you turn to the right or to the left, or go ahead, or turn back, or attempt to stand still, there will come to you some critic to advise the contrary. For ten fail where the one succeeds; and some who failed are jealous, others vain, some full of malice. There are also honest men who, having failed, would warn you of the reef on which they wrecked their too unmanageable bark. I tell you, in the end you must decide all issues for yourself, and there is only one true guide, which is experience.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IN WHICH NARAYAN SINGH DECIDES AN ISSUE WITH THE PISTOL INSTEAD OF THE SWORD.

We did not see the great pearl-coated cavern again.

There was a blizzard blowing but the woman took no more account of it than if it were a mild spring zephyr. She gave us two sacks of barley for the ponies and led the way into the wind with a short, spiked staff in her hand and her hair blown backward in a gray stream.

We had hard work to keep up with her. Dry driving snow reduced our vision to a few yards and it was almost impossible to stare ahead into the stinging blast that froze the moisture on our eyelashes. Faces, hands, thighs and feet were numb. Teeth and ears ached. There were places where the narrow track was smooth ice under an inch or two of loose snow, and we had bewildering glimpses of crags upreared from bottomless ravines that howled, re-echoing their own din, as the blizzard volleyed through them.

One pony, loaded with our canned provisions, slipped where the sheet ice sloped outward from the rock-wall on our right and for a second hung on with his forefoot toed into the cracked ice. Then the ice gave way. He vanished backward into a maelstrom of snow that whirled in the throat of an abyss and with him went the greater part of our provisions.

Soon after that we lost the way and Grim, who was leading, reined up short at the end of a ledge that hung sheer over a precipice. There was hardly room to turn the ponies and we nearly lost two more in the confusion as they crowded one another.

By-and-by I found a cave—a miserable, draughty place that, nevertheless, afforded room and some protection from the storm. I drove the ponies into it and, yelling into Grim's ear, urged him we should stay there until the storm was over. He agreed, but said he was still feeling fit, so would take

careful bearings and go out and hunt for our guide. I objected to his going alone, and Narayan Singh volunteered to go with him.

Chullunder Ghose and I off-loaded the ponies and piled up the loads as a windbreak. We had no fuel and there was thick frost on the cave wall, but by sitting with our backs against the loads we found it more tolerable in there than outside. However, conversation was impossible because of the incessant shrieking of the wind between the boulders that littered the ledge; we sat close together to conserve our body heat and each pursued his own thoughts.

But Grim and Narayan Singh were gone a long time, and the storm grew worse if anything. Whenever the wind reached a certain pitch of violence it brought a booming sound out of the rear of the cave that threw the ponies into panic, so that we had to tie them all together by the head. Then I went to the rear of the cave and found a long, low passage, through which it looked just possible to crawl, and out of which the hollow booming came at intervals.

It seemed worth while to explore in hope of finding a warmer place in which to wait for Grim, so I climbed up on the ledge on which the passage opened and crawled in. I meant to go alone, but as soon as Chullunder Ghose discovered I had left him he grew frightened and came after me.

Until he wedged his great bulk into the passage there was light enough to see by, but the dim light that had found its way past me was now completely cut off. However, by blocking the passage he also obstructed the wind, so I reached in my pocket for some matches.

Before I could strike one Chullunder Ghose called out to me:

"For God's sake, Rammy sahib, I believe this roof is falling in!"

I crawled backward and tried to shove him free with my feet against his shoulders, but could not get sufficient purchase on the rock although I shoved hard enough to make him yell. He said he was quite sure the roof was squeezing down on him, but I ascribed that to panic and told him to lie still until Grim and Narayan Singh returned when they could pull him out backward by the feet.

I went forward again. The air continued fresh, although Chullunder Ghose had cut off the supply behind me; and in places it felt as if someone had enlarged the tunnel with a pick.

I crawled a prodigious distance and struck matches until I had only half a dozen left, discovering no more than that the tunnel kept on curving toward the right, until at last the

curve reversed itself and I saw a pin spot of yellowish light a long way off. It was certainly not daylight. I crawled closer to it and lay still.

For a long time I could only hear my heartbeats. Then a noise from behind announced that Chullunder Ghose was growing weary of confinement, but that was only like a hollow murmur from the bottom of a well. It may have sounded like the faraway voice of the gale to those whose forms I now began to perceive, like dim ghosts, seated in a cave in front of where I lay.

Grim's back was toward me. He had pulled off his yak-skin cap and the shape of his head was unmistakable. Besides, presently I heard his voice and there was no doubt it was Grim. Sitting facing him was the gray-haired woman, the light from two small butter lamps reflected on her face, making it and her hair look almost lemon-colored. Narayan Singh was not there. The third member of the party was a man I had not seen before, although he vaguely resembled one of the older chelas who had sat by the fire in the stalagmite cavern.

I would have called to Grim, but there was something in his attitude and in the low-pitched voices that suggested secrecy. It occurred to me he might be getting information which he might not get if I disturbed him.

The first words that I heard distinctly were the woman's.

"They will treat you as they treated me."

"He said," Grim answered, "you have been well treated and are grateful."

The woman sneered. "He told you that? Look at me!"

Then the other man spoke: "Look at her! Longer and harder than any she has striven. She has been obedient. She has destroyed her own desires. Day-long, night-long she was watched—worked—ministered. Not even she can count the tale of years. Can she go? Then whither? She has thrown the world away, and her return for it is this that you have seen—servitude without thanks. Not even may she listen to the teaching. As for approaching nearer to the Mysteries she has abandoned hope of it. And they will treat you in the same way, letting you advance until retreat is out of the question, then—nothing more!"

"Why should you trouble about my prospects?" Grim asked.

The woman laughed, with a crackle like the sound of dry brushwood burning.

"I warned you," she remarked. "Deal plainly with him."

"Am I not plain?" the man answered. "Everything is forbidden! We are forbidden even to talk of what we know.

Grudgingly, little by little, we are taught some fragment and then are put to wearisome long tests to demonstrate that we can refrain from using what we worked so hard to win. Is it likely that you, who have not spent half a lifetime sitting at a guru's feet, will be allowed to go beyond, for instance, me or that woman? I have a proposal to make."

"I have a man to rescue," Grim answered him.

"I offer to help to rescue him. Why not?"

Grim's answer, like a bark, broke on the silence:

"Why?"

"I have told you why. This chelaship is too long and too empty of results. I don't believe that man you want to rescue, as you call it, is in trouble. Some of the dugpas may be devils but not all. The difference is this: our gurus make us miserable with what they call self-restraint. Dugpas all make use of what they know and have a good time doing it. Why not have a good time while it lasts? There is no such satisfaction as the use of knowledge."

"Is it the quest after knowledge that's making them torture the man?"

"Tshuh-tshuh! Do you believe that? Are you sure of it?"

"Rait wrote a letter," said Grim.

"Are you sure? Dugpas can forge handwriting. Isn't it likelier they are holding a door open for you? Since you haven't been trained to interpret mental messages—although, for that very reason you are all the more amenable to mental impulse, which you can't understand, but which governs you nevertheless—how should they make your approach to them easy except by some trick? They could goad you, but you might rush wildly in the wrong direction. What was it put the thought into your head to enter Tibet?"

"Yes! What was it?" said the woman.

Grim did not answer.

"Why should the White Lodge be willing to receive you, and the Black Lodge not?" the man went on. "Which would you rather have—knowledge now, or knowledge at the end of twenty or thirty lifetimes, which is all the White Lodge offers you and at the cost of endless self-discipline. And they don't even offer it. They make you struggle for it. They withhold it. Whereas the Black Lodge makes things easy. They will teach you and send you back to the United States, where you will enjoy prosperity and influence. I hate this barren land into which I was born and in which my die is cast."

He paused, but Grim said nothing, so the man resumed:

"Listen: by being nobody and living like a louse a man may go through life and never even know there is such

knowledge as I offer you—such opportunity. But you are not a louse. You *must* ally yourself with one force or the other or you will simply be torn apart—as countries often are that try to keep neutral in wartime. The White Lodge is extremely difficult to enter, and if you should succeed in finding the place you seek, the odds are ten thousand to one you would not be admitted. If admitted,—well, imagine for yourself, if you can, what it means to be taught prodigious secrets, which you are not allowed to use! I assure you, virtue grows monotonous. And if your virtue grows weak, you are out—like a sorefooted soldier—like me!"

Grim spoke at last:

"So that's it, eh? You're a chela dismissed for disobedience."

The woman's laughter crackled again like burning brushwood: "Didn't I tell you he is no fool?"

"But if you choose the Black Lodge," the man went on, "you will be allowed to use the forces whose nature will be revealed to you. The Black Lodge, too, is difficult to enter, because none but he who has strength of character is useful to them. But, once in, you are in the ranks of the magicians. You become a power. You are given work to do from which you see immediate results. You are on the side of the erosive forces, like the wind and flood, that are just as much agents of evolution as are those other forces that assemble the detritus and so slowly build up structures that shall only be destroyed again. So now choose."

"I chose some time ago," Grim answered.

The man stood up and I could see his face more distinctly. He was a thin-lipped, handsome fellow with a certain truculence about the angle of his jaw. His sheepskin overcoat was open in front, showing what looked like expensive clothing underneath.

"Which way?" he demanded.

"I might tell you that, perhaps, when I have traveled it a bit," said Grim.

The man sneered, and his smile was like the lip-lift of a panther. I pulled my pistol clear and waited.

"Look at her!" The man pointed at the woman, who kept her eyes fixed on Grim. "Unless you die of weariness you will look and be like her in due time—sexless—hopeless—hideous—neglected—nothing but a drudge for them who keep their secrets to themselves!"

Grim stood up then. I saw the corner of his mouth. He shook himself to adjust the heavy yak-skin overcoat.

"Is it storming still?" he asked.

He began to walk toward some exit that I could not see;

the woman gave him the lamp to hold and stepped in between him and the other, who presently followed them.

I could not turn, so I went forward, in total darkness now that they had taken away the lamp.

I had reached what felt like the end of the hole and was groping for hand- and foot-hold to descend on to the cave floor, when something touched me. I was practically helpless, hanging downward by the legs. I tried to crawl back, but a hand took me under the armpit and a voice said in English:

"This way. You will fall badly unless you lean on me."

Another arm took hold of me. I felt myself being lifted.

"Jump!" said the same voice.

I supposed it was Narayan Singh, so let myself go confidently and was swung, legs outward, in a semicircle landing on level rock.

"There was a hole several hundred feet deep directly under you," said the voice; and suddenly I knew it was not Narayan Singh, but someone whose clothes vaguely smelt of sandalwood.

"This way. Hold this or you will never find the way out," he said, thrusting the end of a girdle into my hand.

I could see nothing. He led me along a winding passage between smooth walls that grew gradually colder as they zigzagged, until finally I could hear the wind and saw dim daylight. Even so I did not recognize his back; like me, he nearly filled the passage with his head within two inches of the roof, so his figure was a mere black silhouette between me and the light.

It was not until he turned to face me outside on a platform sheltered from the storm by projecting spurs of rock, that I recognized Lhaten, with the old quiet, friendly laughter in his eyes.

"You are an elephant," he said. "You blunder into things. It was lucky for you that I knew you were there."

"How did you know it?" I asked him.

"Curiosity," he said, "has been the death of many an elephant! We have ways of knowing things. What do you think of Jimgrim now?"

"Haven't you a way of knowing that, too?" I retorted.

"Yes," he said.

"Then why ask? Curiosity?"

He laughed. "No. I couldn't read your thought before you did think. I gave you an opportunity to mask your thought. That fellow in the cave was dangerous, and so were you. You might have shot him."

"He was a fool," I said, and was going to say more, but he interrupted:

"A dugpa and a fool are one, but a fool can be deadly dangerous."

He began to turn along the track that led around the windward spur, but I stopped him and asked:

"Where did you learn English?"

"Cambridge University. German at Heidelberg. French at the Sorbonne. Why? Did you suppose we kept ourselves secluded in a cloud of ignorance?"

He turned again and led the way around the spur, leaning into the wind as if he liked it. The ledge grew gradually narrower until at last there was barely room to set one foot on it and we had to move crabwise around a cliff side with a howling gorge beneath us—clinging with our fingers to the rock wall.

When we reached broad track again he led for many miles around the outside of the mountain in which those caves were until when he paused to let me overtake him and rest a moment, I asked if he had seen Narayan Singh.

"He draws the sword too readily," he answered and again led on, with the clear intention of avoiding further questions.

Now we climbed along the bare ridge of an escarpment with the full fury of the blizzard in our faces—time and again almost blown into the abyss—and even he grew weary of it. At last he took shelter, sitting on the snow that partly filled a hollow between tumbled crags, and I crouched facing him. The wind shrieked through the crevices and I had to shout even to hear my own voice:

"Where are Grim and the woman?" I asked him.

He bade me look backward along the ridge across which we had come and presently, when a blast of wind lifted and rent the snow cloud, I saw three figures struggling toward us.

"Three?" he asked. "Then they have found the Sikh."

He seemed relieved to know it, as if he had suspected that Narayan Singh might be in difficulties.

"He opens eggs," he said, "with sledge hammers."

Ten minutes after that the woman leaped into the hollow with her hair all caked with snow and frozen; it was almost like a fashionable hat and made her look ridiculous. She laid her lips to Lhaten's ear and whispered.

Then Grim came, dog-tired, and dropped beside me, seeming surprised to find me there but saying nothing. Narayan Singh slid down the side of the hole and squatted on his heels between Grim and Lhaten.

"There is nothing else then dugpas in this land!" he shouted. "It is fit for nothing else!"

"Have you seen one?" asked Lhaten.

"I slew one!"

"Man of blood!" said Lhaten. He got up at once and led the way out of the hollow, finding a track that brought us to the ledge beside the cave where we had left the ponies.

"You will have to sleep here," he remarked. "She will show you where fuel is hidden."

He stood aside to watch us pass in, taking care, I thought, that the Sikh's clothes should not touch him. I went instead to the rear of the cave to pull Chullunder Ghose out of his hole, and it took me several minutes to dislodge him without tearing half his skin off. He was chattering with cold and nearly off his head with terror.

"Voices, Rammy sahib! Voices along the tunnel! When you pulled my feet I thought you were a dugpa! Oh, this thusness! Why leave home to come to such a place! Nevertheless, I shall not turn back! This Cæsar has crossed Rubicon!"

Lhaten ceased talking to Grim as Narayan Singh entered the cave behind the woman, both of them heavily burdened with wood from some near-by cache. Narayan Singh threw down his heap on the floor and stood and looked at Lhaten, folding his arms truculently.

"Man of peace, I offend you?"

"No," said Lhaten.

"Take me by the hand then!"

Narayan Singh held out his right hand, which Lhaten took in his without the slightest hesitation.

"But if you keep on killing you will kill yourself, because blood draws blood," said Lhaten.

"Lo, I slew a dugpa," said the Sikh. "What of it? I have slain many whose time had come to die, but who were worthier to live than that one. Consider: I followed Jimgrim in search of the woman. She beckoned us over that ridge we crossed a while ago, and we came to a cave, which she entered, bidding Jimgrim follow. But to me she said, 'Wait and guard the place.' So I stood in the storm until a man came who sought to enter. I forbade him and we had speech civilly enough until he told me he would show another entrance to the cave that I should guard instead of that one and I gave him leave to go to Lhassa or wherever else he chose, so be he moved himself. He went, but he pointed to where the other entrance was.

"And soon I saw Jimgrim leave that other entrance; or it seemed to me that I saw Jimgrim. He walked away from me in great haste, so I followed. He led me a great climb over the mountain, I can tell you, and when I came on him—or thought I did—he vanished!

" 'Dugpas!' I said to myself; and I set to work to find that cave again. But the snow had blotted out my trail. And when at last I drew near the cave there were footsteps showing that many people had come out of it. And there, standing in the cave mouth was the one who had sought to enter. He said he would show me where Jimgrim had gone, so I followed him. But there were no footsteps where we went and the trail was very difficult, so I called a halt. Then he said to me: 'Your Jimgrim is no good. He is in the wrong hands. He will soon be like Rait is—mad and being practised on. You should abandon Jimgrim and let me show you genuine mysteries.'

"So I showed *him* a genuine one—how a man's life leaves the body when a pistol bullet enters at the brain. After a while came Jimgrim and the woman looking for me. Have you anything to say to that?"

"Not a great deal," Lhaten answered. "Only if you keep on killing there will be a weight of death against you that not even your courage can prevail against."

"You speak riddles," the Sikh answered.

"The word two is a riddle, until you divide it into one plus one," said Lhaten and then, buttoning his overcoat as if he heard a summons through the gale, he took his leave of us and hurried off.

Lhaten always came and went as if there were an hotel or a club house just around the corner.

Of every ten who tread the Middle Way to Knowledge there are nine who turn aside through avarice, though not all avarice is born of belly-hunger or the greed for gold. Some seek preeminence, such eminence as they have won corroded by insane pride. So by this mark you shall know the Middle Way, that whoso treads it truly avoids vices, having found them in himself, so that he knows their habit and is temperate in judgment, throwing no stones lest he break the windows of his own soul.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CHULLUNDER GHOSE CHENRESI.

GRIM now knew something I did not know. He saw something I did not see; and, though all sorts of similes suggest themselves to illustrate the feeling I experienced, none quite explains it.

Not being an artist with either pen or brush the facts of art don't limit me, and none except an artist, possibly, will smile when I suggest that a hack portrait painter or a writer of journalese may feel the same toward a rising genius as I began to feel toward Grim. I was aware his genius had gone beyond mine and, though by his own unrecognition of the fact he puzzled me, I felt an impulse, free (I think) from rivalry or any meaner instinct, to discover the secret and so to keep, if not abreast of him, at least not far behind.

The change in the attitude of others toward him was much more marked than any outward change in Grim himself. The old woman treated him as if he were a young god, to be waited on and possibly reproved at times, but destined for a throne on high Olympus. She shared the cave with us that night, and though Grim did not notice it I saw that she lay where her body would keep the draught away from him.

Narayan Singh, who had sustained his whole life long that hugely difficult rôle of a proud and patriotic free man in a conquered country, seemed to take his cue from the old woman. His deference became extravagant, the more effective since he cloaked it under military gruffness. He threatened our babu with mayhem for daring to use the word Jimgrim without the added "sahib." He was even distant toward me because I argued with Grim about how much barley we should give the ponies. (I was for conserving rations, Grim for keeping up the ponies' strength and trusting

the future for additional supplies of grain; and, as it happened, Grim was right.)

That blizzard was the worst we had experienced and it raged the whole night through. We lay amid a din of avalanches, crashing boulders and a cataclysmic orchestra of shrieking wind. The very mountain seemed to tremble, and the tunnel that led from the rear of our cave kept up a series of irregular explosions like the booming of a big drum.

But dawn broke cold and clear, with no wind, and our thermometer at zero—falling steadily. The silence as we filed out of the cave on ponyback and saw the tumbled range around us glittering under an azure sky, was stupefying. Where the wind had shrieked the night before, now sound itself seemed frozen. When a pinnacle of ice a mile away crashed down into a chasm and was split into glittering jewels on the fanged rocks, all the resulting din came to us like a whisper, as if even echoes were afraid to speak.

Hitherto we had marched into curtains of snow that revealed only glimpses of crag and chasm when the wind tore momentary rents in it. Now square leagues looked like inches and the peaks a hundred miles away seemed almost within pistol shot. The ponies, stringing out along the trail in front of me, picking their way behind our bare-legged guide, resembled insects. Yet in the clear air I could count the feathers of an eagle's wings, soaring a hundred feet below me and a thousand feet above the snow-filled valley bottom.

Nine-tenths of all the track we traveled was bare ridge, swept by the wind so that no snow lay on it. At times we crossed naked summits; oftener we skirted their flanks along ledges that hung over fathomless space. There was made trail here and there, with boulder bridges heaped across wide fissures in the rock. But now and then the trail ceased altogether, where the storms had wrecked a mountainside, and there we had to chop a foothold for the ponies across slopes where the frozen crust would bear a man's weight but let the loaded ponies through on to the glass ice underneath.

There was one such place that sloped toward a chasm on our left hand and for more than half a mile we had to skirt the edge of it, keeping away from the cliff on our right because icicles hung there, that crashed in the strength of the sun. We were midway over when we saw men peering at us, their hooded heads jet black against the sky as they leaned over the top of the cliff from which ice hung like blades of guillotines.

There was a noise that at first suggested intermittent rifle fire and Narayan Singh made swift to load one of the Tibetan rifles Benjamin had sold us. But the crash of ice

explained the sound. They were chopping the ton-weight icicles to make them fall across our path.

Narayan Singh fired three times, and it was impossible to see whether he had hit a man or not. But one of his bullets smashed into the very root of an enormous icicle and brought it avalanching down on us, crushing the loaded pony next ahead of me and sweeping him over the edge of the slope. A yell of exultation from the cliff announced that the disaster had been seen, but the rifle had served its purpose; no more ice was dropped on us and our assailants vanished.

When we reached the end of that gruesome slope Grim called a halt to rest the ponies and our guide came back to find out why we were not following. Grim asked her who the men might be who had dropped that ice on us.

"Did not Lhaten warn you?" she retorted. "Did he not say, in the cave last night, that monks are watching for you?"

Not long after that we saw their monastery—if the name serves for a wasps' nest built on a cliffside under the projecting shoulder of a mountain so that none could reach it from above, and from beneath the only access to it was up a zigzag path a few feet wide that, if defended, not an enemy in the world could force.

"Whither you go next," she said and pointed to the monastery, laughing at the expression on Chullunder Ghose's face.

"Krishna!" he exploded. Then, with a grimace at me: "Rammy sahib, they have made our Jimgrim mad! He leads on!"

"None but the mad can lead except in circles," said Narayan Singh. "I have served under many officers. Madmen were always the best."

Lhaten probably had said a great deal more to Grim than I overheard in the cave the night before. While I was dragging out the babu from the tunnel and Narayan Singh was bringing fuel there was plenty of time for conversation. However, while we lingered on a broad ledge, where one dead, dwarfed and twisted tamarisk was held by the roots in rock that it had burst asunder in the days gone by, a shower of boulders dropped from overhead, one shearing off the tree as cleanly as if a giant's axe had done it.

"So much for doubt!" said Narayan Singh. "We should have ridden on."

He suited action to the word and led the way, another volley of boulders crashing to the ledge behind us, many of them striking where we had sat our ponies half a dozen breaths before, then bounding down into the ravine, whence their echoes followed us like laughter from the underworld.

I tried to overtake Grim, but there were ponies in the way

and the track kept narrowing until the loads on one side scraped the cliff and on the other hung projecting over the ravine. When I shouted he merely waved his hand and rode on; and I could see the woman, striding along like a mountaineer ahead of him, looking straight toward the distant monastery. Whoever was frightened, she was not. Her gait suggested cheerfulness because of the journey's end in view.

And now, instead of following the ridge that joined two mountains, we descended by hair-raising grades to the very depths of the ravine and crossed it where echoing ice had spanned the frozen watercourse with a bridge that Romans might have built. The ice was even yellow from the ocher borne downstream, and from a hundred yards away it so resembled masonry that I looked for a guardhouse and expected to see someone with a rifle standing there.

The effect was increased by the presence of tamarisks crowded near by in the folds of the gorge, and of wood stacks where the monks had cut their winter's fuel and piled it, cleaning up even the splinters of the precious stuff. There were crags on the cliff behind the bridge that looked like castle turrets, and the track beyond the ice bridge led between two bastions of naked rock that would have checked artillery.

But instead of a man with a rifle a young monk in a soiled cloak of faded yellow appeared midway in between the bastions and, with a prayer wheel whirling in his right hand, seemed to challenge us. He was shouting, but the echoes threw the words into confusion, so that it sounded as if ten or twelve men were holding a noisy argument.

Our gray old guide strode straight toward him, swinging along with the stride of a man, her spiked staff like a marshal's baton in the hollow of her arm, and though the monk kept shouting at her she neither changed her gait nor paused until she came within two yards and turned her back on him to wait for us—we taking our time about it because the far slope of the bridge was slippery and the ponies needed help.

By the time we reached those bastions the monk was foaming at the mouth. The frenzy in his eyes was like a maniac's. He kept his prayer wheel spinning like a top while he searched our faces; but when Chullunder Ghose came dragging the last of the ponies he seemed to choke, as if his heart was in his throat—stared with his yellow eyes popping—and ran.

Our gray guide looked at Grim and laughed, her wrinkles leaping into sudden life and vanishing again.

"They in the twilight jump at all illusions," she said. "I told

the fool the Lord Chenresi is his monastery's guest," and, with a mocking gesture at Chullunder Ghose, she strode on between the bastions.

We had nearly a dozen miles to traverse yet, although the monastery was not more than one mile distant as an eagle would have gone. The trail led all around the bases of the intervening hills, marked well enough because the monks had used it for packing fuel, but steep, difficult and dangerous. Our ponies were exhausted when we reached the cliff on which the wasps' nest buildings perched with their stone walls leaning outward from a ledge three thousand feet above us. And, weary though the ponies were, they had to climb three thousand feet, up a path that I imagine is unique even in that land of guarded solitude.

At the foot there was a *chorten*—a very big one, looking something like a dome over a tomb. It was placed in the midst of the track which forked around it, so that all who came or went could pass it on their right hand. Behind it was a fissure in the cliffside, narrow and as ragged as forked lightning. Entering that, we found ourselves inside a screen of rock that enclosed a space of two or three acres, deep under accumulated snow.

An irregular road had been dug through the snow to a gash in the foot of the cliff, where it entered and ascended for a hundred feet through a tunnel that had been enlarged out of a natural cave. Then we came into daylight on a ledge of half an acre from which we again entered a tunnel and rose another hundred feet, if not more. From the upper mouth of that second tunnel the track led for nearly half a mile along a level parapet of rock until it turned sharply and began to zigzag upward across the face of the cliff. It was so steep that a loaded pony had the utmost it could do to climb; but it was very largely hand-hewn and had been surveyed so that the prevailing wind would sweep it clear of snow.

In places it looked almost as if dynamite had done the work, but the rocks were split too evenly along the grain. The fractures were ancient, but at one of the hair-pin turns we passed a rock that told the story: they had bored and filled the bore with water, leaving that to freeze in the terrific winter weather. Nature had done the rest.

There was a marvelous economy of distance—a contempt of steepness indicating that the men who did the work had not had horses in their minds. And there were sections where the wind would not have swept the snow away and where tunnels had been cut for fifty yards or more—not straight, but following the rock faults.

Leading our staggering ponies we emerged at last through

a ragged gap on to a ledge so small that the buildings reared on it appeared to be pushing one another off. There was a courtyard, thirty or thirty-five feet square, crowded between the mountain and the monastery storehouse; but in order to make room for that the builders had projected the foundations of their walls out over the sheer cliffside—which created the appearance of a wasps' nest from below. The roofs looked Chinese, but the architecture was careless, crude and (compared to the road we had climbed by) modern. There was possibly accommodation for a hundred monks, if they should choose to live with economy of comfort.

We were greeted by a great horn blowing and the clangor of a group of bronze bells swung on one beam. Not a monk was in sight until a man in yellow hood and robes emerged out of a door that faced us, on the far side of the courtyard, and went through the motions of a lamaistic benediction. He was followed by a group of excited monks, a few of whom wore black, the others yellow. All had prayer wheels, which they kept in constant motion.

He looked nervously suspicious of our old guide, who greeted him with a note of laughter that seemed, nevertheless, to hint at consequences should he fail to answer civilly. And civilly he spoke up, in Tibetan, using complimentary phrases as he asked our names, and whence we were, and why we came.

The woman glanced at Grim and stepped back, leaving him a pace or two in front of all of us. But the man in yellow hardly looked at Grim at first; his eyes were on Chullunder Ghose and his lips kept working as if something choice to eat were almost within his grasp.

"Our names don't matter," Grim said. "Tell why your monks attacked us on the road."

"It is the custom," he answered, his eyes meeting Grim's for a second, then returning to the babu's face, which seemed to fascinate him.

Grim made a gesture toward the woman: "Is our guide not known to you?"

"Oh, yes." He pursed his lips and looked ashamed of mentioning a woman. "But the Higher Law attends to whether guides succeed or not. They who die, die. They who do not die, may approach. This is a sacred place."

He began looking at Chullunder Ghose again.

"Do you mean, you try to kill whoever comes this way?" Grim demanded.

He answered impatiently, as if he thought the question stupid:

"It is death that kills. Are you not here? Of what are you complaining?"

Still staring at Chullunder Ghose he gave a curt command and some of his monks began leading our ponies into a shed backed against the cliff on one side of the courtyard. I went in with them to make sure that the ponies were off-loaded properly and to see what could be done about obtaining barley. It took time to bargain with the monks for grain, and when I came out the courtyard was empty, except for the old woman, who pointed toward a door that faced me. I opened it and walked unannounced into a square room in which an image of Chenresi squatted at the farther end. The walls were bare of ornament but all the roof beams were extravagantly carved, and at the side of the room on the right of the image was a low, carved wooden divan on which the ruler of the monastery sat surrounded by a dozen of his followers.

Facing him on a mat on the floor Chullunder Ghose sat between Grim and Narayan Singh. Our babu looked embarrassed. The Sikh was scowling. Grim wore his poker expression, which signifies nothing except that he is thinking like a clock behind it. Nobody took any notice of me, so I sat down on a small rug near the door where I could watch proceedings.

The lama in the yellow robe who ruled the place was talking in a vain, didactic voice intended to impress the monks who stood around him, as undoubtedly it did. But the dialect he used was more like the Ladakhi than Tibetan, and I was able to piece together most of the conversation.

"That woman said, 'The Lord Chenresi is a visitor.' She is a woman. There are devils in her. But if it were untrue she would not have dared to say it. It is therefore true."

"I am flesh and blood, and I am hungry," Chullunder Ghose answered.

"The Lord Buddha also fasted, so that is no argument," the lama retorted. "You wish not to be recognized, and it is possible that you yourself don't know what great one is incarnate in you. Nevertheless, I recognize the Lord Chenresi. It appears to me that he has chosen a very inferior body, doubtless for his own good reasons. Discipline is needed—penances—instruction and self-mortification, that the spirit may prevail over the flesh. I know. I am wise in these matters. It is no use your denying it. How is the new Living Buddha chosen when the Living Buddha dies? Does he not reincarnate into the offspring of a peasant woman very often? But are they deceived whose task it is to find and recognize him? And the child, in whom the Living Buddha is incarnate, is he not like other children? Does he not need

discipline and teaching? Must the body not be brought into subjection with the help of learned counselors, in order that the spirit may prevail over the corruption of the flesh, and wisdom pour forth? What has brought you here? You say, you seek a certain Lung-tok who is held fast in a dungeon. Allegory! All our books are filled with allegories. I am learned in interpretation. That is the voice of the spirit, seeking to release humanity from bondage on the Wheel of Life! Hither you came, because the spirit in you guided. Here you shall find refuge while the flesh melts and the spirit shines through."

Poor Chullunder Ghose suppressed a shudder and the vanity that lingered with him until then began to wilt. He glanced at Grim, but Grim stared straight in front of him—listening—thinking. On Narayan Singh's face there began to flicker the resemblance of a smile as if he saw the full significance of our babu's dilemma and was pitiless.

I think Grim whispered then, but it is very hard to tell what he is doing when he sits with that expression on his face. He can speak without moving his lips and, like ventriloquists, he has the knack of making your own eyes deceive you.

At any rate, Chullunder Ghose's vanity returned, but with a hundredfold effectiveness because he had assumed it now and was acting a part, whereas before he had been merely flattered by the identification of himself as the abiding place of an incarnate god. Besides, his wits were working, spurred by that threat of penances and education.

"Priest," he answered, "who are you to speak to me with arrogance? It is the flesh that speaks. Your spirit would forbid such insolence unless your inner ears were deaf. Shame on you! Ignorant monk that you are, shall you teach such as me?"

Never a mouse amid the skirts of maiden aunts created such a fuss as that speech did! The ruler of the monastery (he was far below the rank of abbot) had not wit enough to hide the half-hysteria that seized him. He sat blowing out his cheeks and kept his prayer wheel going.

The other monks were simply fanatics, reduced by superstition and necessity to a state of ignorant and cunningly enforced submission to the lama's will. It staggered them to hear him rebuked and to see him unable to answer. Some leered, as if they hoped the bonds of discipline were broken. Others looked frightened. They were torn between allegiance to their chief and superstition.

Grim probably whispered again, although I did not see his lips move. Our babu rose to the occasion.

"Do you expect me to reveal myself to mere monks?" he demanded. "Do you think I would favor such ears as theirs with what I might possibly say to you alone?"

The question worked like magic. He in yellow was himself again. He turned on the men around him and rebuked them furiously. His mildest epithet was "worms in a dog's entrails," and the mildest threat was "insects you shall be—dung-beetles!" He decreed half-rations for a month. He ordered midnight penances. They ran from him before he should order worse things; and when they had left the room by an inner door he went to make sure none was listening outside. Slamming the door again he strode back to his seat, with his prayer wheel like a jester's bauble whirling in his right hand.

"Now," he said, "speak!"

I admired him at last, in a way. He abandoned hypocrisy. With his hands laid on his thighs and an expression on his face of "now or never," he defied us, tacitly admitting that he did not believe a word that he had said about Chenresi being incarnated in the babu.

It was Grim who answered, looking up like some chela answering his guru: "It is for you to speak first."

"You are foreigners!" The lama put scorn into the word, and something more than the suggestion of a threat.

"We are entitled to use this route," Grim answered.

"Here I am the custodian!" The lama blew his cheeks out, tossed his hands palms upward and then slapped his thighs, implying, without wasting words on it, that he was sitting there to bargain, not to argue about rights of way.

I opened the door an inch or two and looked for our gray-haired guide, but she had vanished. The courtyard was empty. I shut the door again.

"I am a lama," said the man in yellow. "It is lamas who identify incarnate Buddhas. If I say the Lord Chenresi is among us, some will listen. Some of high rank will confirm my word. It is a good thing for religion to have manifestations—which have been scarce of late, and men are not so respectful as they used to be. Also, it is a long way from Lhassa to this monastery. There can be a rumor sent forth, that will take hold and excite, arousing the hope of people, of whom many will be monks. So that they who will be sent from Lhassa to investigate will not dare to deny the story, knowing how much safer it is to deceive men than to undeceive them."

"There is no deception about you," said Grim. "You are a rascal."

"Not so. There have lately been rumors of new Living Buddhas, but the plots failed because the wrong men man-

aged them and the conspirators were too near Lhassa. I am far off—and the right man."

He pursed his lips. In that mood he looked capable of emulating Genghis Khan and it was hard to remember he was the same hysterical incompetent who had been panic-stricken when rebuked before his monks. Suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, he gave us actual news of Rait.

"What is this that you seek?" he demanded. "Some chiling who has been imprisoned? Well: they who hold him are expecting you, and if they catch you—Pfouff!"

He blew out his cheeks again and slapped his thighs.

"As it happens," he went on, "those are the very ones who would accept the Lord Chenresi. They are individuals who know that there are no hairs on a fish. They are not fools. They are powerful. Some of them are my friends, though I do wear yellow."

"What do you propose?" Grim asked him.

He pointed at Chullunder Ghose, whose face turned liver color with the dread that seized him. Humor, vanity and courage were all gone and his jaw trembled as he stammered out a protest:

"I will not have greatness thrust on me! I——"

"Give him to me, and I will get your chiling for you!"

Grim held his tongue. Chullunder Ghose eyed Grim as a criminal looks at the jury when they file in to announce their verdict. Narayan Singh spoke:

"I say no to it! Aye, by my honor I say no to it!"

Grim snapped three English words at him:

"Who asked you?"

Stung by the snub Narayan Singh muttered and glared at the babu. Grim made a proposal to the lama:

"If you know where the man we seek is hidden, tell me, and we four will make our own terms with his captors."

"Atcha! Bohut atcha!"* said Narayan Singh.

*Good! Very good!

And forget not this: that outward semblance of authority is not a necessary symptom of its essence. There are men in high place who have no authority at all beyond what indolence confers because the indolence of many is the opportunity of one. Such men lead multitudes astray.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE YELLOW LAMA.

THAT yellow lama was an incarnation of a paradox, whatever our babu might be. He seemed to deduce from Grim's speech that we were on better than nodding terms with the black art experts whose prisoner Rait was, or was supposed to be.

"Chiling," he said, forcing his voice, which was inclined to waver from so many mixed emotions, "you came here with a White Lodge guide. You go to a Black Lodge destination?"

"Will you do what I asked?" Grim demanded.

"I question how you came not knowing how to find the way hence," said the lama.

It appeared to me we were as good as prisoners, unless we chose to use our firearms and bolt for it down that zig-zag trail. At almost any part of it they could easily drop boulders on us; and if, on utterly leg-weary ponies, we should manage to escape the monks, there would remain the impossible task of finding our own way forward or backward before our scant remaining store of barley and canned rations was exhausted.

However, Grim put another interpretation on it:

"We are your guests," he remarked.

"Ah!" said the lama slyly, "but you said you wish to go to Jalung-dzong."

Grim's eyebrow twitched. That was our first intimation of the name of the place where Rait might be. But Grim put a doubtful face on it:

"You are trying to deceive us as to where the man is."

"There is a devil in you," said the lama, wetting his lips with a tongue that licked out swiftly like a snake's.

He began studying Chullunder Ghose again. Then, rolling his tongue in his mouth a time or two, he presently propounded terms.

"I shall send you to Jalung-dzong, provided you leave that

one here. Let them give you the chiling. I shall let them appoint this a place of pilgrimage. Crowds may come and see the living Lord Chenresi. That will arouse religious fervor, which brings crowds into subjection. For me there will be perquisites. For them power, which is all they crave. That one," he said, nodding at the babu, "shall have adulation and a life of ease. You may take your chiling and return to where you came from. You agree?"

Grim did not answer. The lama began to look furious, swaying himself to and fro—glanced at me, as if a thought occurred to him of appealing to me to manage Grim—abandoned that, and played a trump card suddenly.

"You are spies!" he said, curling his lip.

"Yes, we certainly are," Grim retorted.

Chullunder Ghose gasped. Narayan Singh moved almost imperceptibly, his right hand drawing nearer to the pistol hidden underneath his coat. I held my breath. If there is anywhere on earth where a denounced spy is in danger it is on the frontier of Tibet. But our emotions were as nothing to the lama's, whose eyes nearly bulged from his head. A spy, who calmly boasted he was one, was something new in his experience.

For a second I thought he would summon his monks. Most lamaistic monasteries have their fighting complement—the more degraded ones particularly. Known as dok-dokpas they belong to the lowest rank of the fraternity. Too lazy or indifferent to memorize the ancient texts, they are not qualified to attain merit in that way, so they acquire it second-hand, fighting and brawling to preserve their betters from the necessity to fight. Perhaps the sudden movement of Narayan Singh's right hand toward his weapon, or, it may be, the look of confidence on Grim's face, made him change his mind.

"Did *they* send you to spy on me?" he asked.

Grim did not answer.

The lama got up suddenly and left the room by the inner door through which his monks went when he drove them out. Chullunder Ghose seized Grim's arm.

"Let us go! Let us go now—swiftly!" he insisted.

Before Grim could answer the lama returned followed by a monk in black robes with a sheepskin jacket over them. He looked like a stage assassin. His ferocity, and the care he took to show it, verged on the ridiculous. He rolled his eyes, folded his arms, and snorted as if the very air he breathed offended him; and he eyed us one by one like a butcher considering sheep. When the lama sat he stood behind him glaring at us.

"If I had known it was *they* who wanted that chiling who is held at Jalung-dzong, *they* should have had him long ago," said the lama.

He appeared to have recovered self-possession, but he dropped his eyelids. He had a false card up his sleeve.

"This monk," he said, "has often been to Jalung-dzong, and he will go now, though the way is difficult in winter. He will bear my message, which the monks of Jalung-dzong will not reject. So when you reach a certain place beyond the Tsang-po River you shall find the chiling. You may take him. Do what you will. If I had known *they* wanted him released I would have seen to it long ago."

"You mean the monks at Jalung-dzong will release Rait at your order?"

"At my request," he corrected, pursing his lips.

"Then why not have him brought here?" Grim asked.

Instantly he went into another of his fits of nervousness. (He must have been a problem for the monks who had to get along with him!) He began swaying on his seat, trying to suppress the hysteria that seemed to seize him whenever his will was opposed.

"I won't have him here! I won't have anything to do with him!" he exploded. "This is my monastery. It is I who say what shall be and what shall not be. It is enough for you that he is to be taken to a certain place, and that I shall give you a guide to that place. What more do you want?"

"Nothing," said Grim, "unless your generosity provides a meal for visitors."

"It cooks."

He snorted and left the room again, the stage-assassin following, and for a while we sat there with a sense of being spied on, although there was nothing to indicate that we were watched. The feeling was so intense that none of us spoke: we sat and searched the walls for an eye-hole with an eye behind it.

After a while Grim got up and opened the outer door.

"Bad medicine!" he remarked to me. "You sit there, Rammy old top. We've got into the wrong pew somehow. I'll explore."

He took Narayan Singh and left Chullunder Ghose with me. The babu and I sat listening, convinced we were watched, yet unable to determine where the eyes were. It was probably five minutes before the inner door began to creak and opened gradually. Suddenly a woman stepped inside, shut the door quickly behind her and bolted it.

Some of the Tibetan monasteries are not notorious for morality, nor had our friend in yellow impressed me with the

odor of his sanctity; the marvel was not that a woman was there, but that such a female as the one who leaned against the bolted door and leered at us should have been able to play paramour.

Her mouth was like a gash made with a knife. She was a Tibetan, and of no high rank, which is to say that she was oily, covered with a thick veneer of dirt, and pig-eyed. But she had been told, and she believed, that she was charming; and she set to work to charm Chullunder Ghose and me. It felt like being ogled by Lilith, the she-monster who seduced our father Adam, before Eve turned up to make him our respected ancestor.

For the sake of the proprieties we smiled, since there are no worse manners than to air one's prejudices in a foreign land, nor anything, in any place, more dangerous than manners inappropriate to the occasion (as the moralists discover now and then, who make long faces at the mistresses of kings). I, personally, am a blunderer with women, but Chullunder Ghose is a Lothario. He arose to the occasion.

"Priestess of immaculate maternity, we squirm!" he said. "This babu is beside himself." To me, in English he remarked: "No safety in numbers, Rammy sahib. Polyandry is polite custom hereabouts!"

She beamed on him and came a little nearer, he ridiculously conquering an impulse to run, shrinking and then turning the involuntary movement into over-acted thrills of ecstasy.

"Chenresi!" she giggled and pointed a thumb at him.

"Krishna! Could my wife but see this!" he exploded.

The woman mistook that for a compliment and sidled closer. She was coy, no other word for it—coy, with a kind of spiderish determination underneath the "luck-covering" as they call dirt in Tibet.

"Chenresi!" she giggled again. Then her little bright pig-eyes glanced at me and she began to walk toward me quickly.

However, my alarm was premature. She shot the door bolt home and, after favoring me with one more furtive glance, returned to the more gallant man. After ogling him a moment she sat down on the mat and faced him, almost knee to knee.

"My name is Kyim-shang."

That statement entitled us to doubt whatever else she might say. Kyim-shang was the famous queen of Tibet who was the daughter of an emperor of China; such names are not bestowed on modern peasants.

Having given her announcement time to sink in she produced out of the ample storage space beneath her bulging

bosom two gold chains. Then, touching the earrings that weighed down the lobes of her ears, she intimated (or so we understood) by signs that Chullunder Ghose should estimate their value.

"Now you like me?" she asked.

By the grace of such wit as remained to our babu he did not say no to her. She took his silence for consent and loosed the floods of speech.

She spoke so fast that I could not make head or tail of it at first and Chullunder Ghose did hardly any better, but it dawned on her before long that she was wasting time and breath, so she began to talk more slowly and, though her dialect was difficult, we picked out enough words to get the general drift.

She was sick of the monastery. The monks ill-treated her, calling her foul names, although by bringing her there and keeping her they were just as guilty as herself. Black or yellow robed, they were a bad lot and there was not much to choose between them, but the dok-dokpas were the worst. She said that two-thirds of the monks in that monastery were dok-dokpas, and the head lama was afraid of them.

"They tried to drop rocks and ice on you," she went on, "and he knew it. But since you got here with a right guide, he is afraid to let them kill you now. Yet the only way he can prevent it is by promising to have you killed by someone else. So in the morning he will send that man to Jalung-dzong to warn those monks to lie in wait for you."

"Why do the dok-dokpas want to kill us?" I asked.

She ignored me but answered my question as if Chullunder Ghose had asked it:

"They are afraid you will tell tales about them that may reach the Kün-Dün,* who might send them a lama who can really discipline them. Between flattery and threats they can manage this old fool."

I asked another question and she answered without turning her head to look at me, her idea, I think, being that Chullunder Ghose might possibly be jealous.

"Do you know anything about the chiling, who was called Lung-tok, who was taken prisoner and sent to Jalung-dzong?"

"Everybody knows. He tried to learn the secrets of the dugpas. Now they learn his. And if they catch you they will learn yours."

"Mother of modesty, why do you think we were guided to this place?" Chullunder Ghose asked her.

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*The Dalai lama.

"I don't know," she answered. "But you will be guided to your death from this place unless you listen to me."

We listened eagerly enough, she thawing toward me and even talking directly at me as it began to penetrate her understanding that the babu did not mind. Nevertheless, she rather resented his lack of jealousy.

"Go forward—go backward—or remain here; you will be killed! You must escape to-night, and there is nobody except me who will show you how. You must leave those other two, and you must do exactly as I tell you."

She beckoned me, fingers downward, signifying I should sit a little closer although farther from her than Chullunder Ghose. Then with lowered voice and her head between Chullunder Ghose and me she spoke slowly, repeating such words as she thought we did not understand:

"Leave the ponies—no good. Each man carry barley. To-night—I come—you follow."

She laid three fingers on her lips for secrecy, stuck her tongue out at Chullunder Ghose and, with a sidewise leer at me, suggestive of a crumb of patronage, scrambled to her feet and left the room by the inner door, moving much more silently and swiftly than she looked capable of doing.

Her aroma remained, however. I did not know what to think, and as Chullunder Ghose was obviously going to ask me what I did think as soon as he had finished flapping away the smell, I fled into the open air in search of Grim, intending to repeat the woman's conversation to him, without comment, while it remained fresh in my memory.

Narayan Singh was pacing up and down outside the stables, stamping his feet and flapping his arms to keep warm. He looked worried, and relieved to see me, glancing at the sky that was already almost dark and at the shadows deepening in every corner of the courtyard. He kept hitching his sword—hilt forward.

"Jimgrim went in there," he said, jerking his thumb toward the stable door. "He bade me wait."

I opened the door and called to Grim. There was no answer and no sound except from the ponies. It was very dark in there so I struck a match. No sign of Grim. I struck another one and went to examine a pile of sheepskins over in the farther corner; there were deeper shadows there but I drew them blank. Narayan Singh, framed in the doorway, assured me he had seen Grim enter the stable. I told him to come and look for himself, but he refused.

"Nay! Jimgrim bade me stand guard."

I struck more matches and looked everywhere for some other way out of the stable, even pulling aside the heap of

sheepskins; but at the back there appeared to be nothing except solid cliff, into which the roof-beams were set, and in the other three walls there was only the one door. I returned to Narayan Singh and questioned him but he stuck to his story.

"Jimgrim went in there and closed the door. Nay, I do not know why. Nay, I heard no sound. On my honor I have not slept. I have stood here as he bade me, and he has not come out."

I told him about the woman and what she had said.

"One woman was already bad enough," he commented. "That hag who led us here was a mother of mischief. I looked into her eyes and I saw mockery. If there is another woman meddling, it is time we made ready for trouble."

Narayan Singh seemed in a nervous, superstitious mood and kept on glancing at the deepening shadows. It was clouding over and there were no stars visible. I shut the stable door and told Narayan Singh to keep a sharp lookout for Grim while I would go and bring the babu.

Nothing in the world was darker than that courtyard by the time I crossed it. I could hardly see the monastery door but I could hear the monks at prayer, murmuring responses to an accompaniment of bell-ringing and the blare of a radong. It was pitch dark in the room where I had left the babu, but I heard voices whispering and as I entered he spoke aloud:

"Nay, pearl of purity, I swore a vow never to offend against a virgin. He whose name is Rammy shall offend first. Here he comes."

He clutched my arm, the woman pulling at his other sleeve, and although I could not see I could hear him try to thrust her away from him, she resisting.

"Rammy sahib, this mountain of corruption—this chasm of stinks says we are to go now while the monks are all praying. She has brought two bags of barley. She says unless we follow her the yellow lama will imprison us."

I told him that Grim was missing and that my plan was to get the ponies ready. He agreed. He would have agreed to anything to escape from the arms of that Tibetan woman.

"But unless we let her come with us she will have her revenge—which might possibly be sweeter to her than herself," he remarked. "She would certainly spread the alarm."

Abruptly he commanded her to gather up the barley bags and carry them. She grunted as she hove the weight of one of them and called to him to help her lift the other, but we strode out and left her to follow or not as she might choose.

She dropped the bags and overtook us, taking our arms and forcing herself between us.

"Never mind!" she exclaimed. "Never mind! I shall go back for the barley. You wait in the stable for me."

She followed us toward the stable door, recoiling when she saw Narayan Singh loom out of the shadow.

"Tsa-a-ah!" she exclaimed. "Where is the other one?"

Narayan Singh laid hold of her. "Aye, where!" he answered. "Mother of abominations, you shall stay until we find him!"

She let loose a peculiarly modulated yell. It was not loud but there was terror in it. Narayan Singh opened the stable door, thrust her through and closed it again.

"No sign of Grim?" I asked.

"None, but I have faith in Jimgrim. He will turn up."

"Let's be ready for him when he comes," I said. "You'd better help us load the ponies."

He demurred, having orders to stay where he was; but I saw no sense in his standing there, since he was twice as good as Chullunder Ghose at managing the ponies in the dark. I told him I took the responsibility and he went into the stable, muttering. Chullunder Ghose went next; I, last, and shut the door behind me since the monks might have a watchman on the prowl.

Then I felt in my pocket for matches and shook the box, and suddenly a man's voice close beside me exclaimed "No!" A hand like a steel vise clutched my arm. Chullunder Ghose gasped. I heard an oath from Narayan Singh and then the swish-swish of his saber. Then a cut-off scream; I did not doubt it was the woman's.

Until he shall be tested to the utmost none may know what hidden weakness lingers in him. Neither can he know his own strength.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER TWENTY

PRISONERS. JIMGRIM IS MISSING.

I STRUCK out right and left into the dark. I was surrounded. There were other men who moved among the ponies, whispering, and I was sprung on from behind by men who struggled to tie my arms while another drove his thumbs into my throat. Chullunder Ghose cried out for help, but someone struck him on the head and after that he made no sound. Narayan Singh fought like a catamount somewhere in among the ponies that lashed out with their heels at random; he kept shouting to me to use my pistol, but with two men on either arm I could not reach it.

Suddenly he shook himself free and used his, getting in two shots before they rushed him from behind. I heard the pistol knocked or dragged out of his hand; it struck the wall not far from me. Then I went down under half a dozen men, whose greasy bodies stank of the accumulated filth of years. My muscles cracked as they got the cords around my arms and I cried out to Narayan Singh to save himself and find Grim if he could. An invisible hand struck me hard over the mouth, feeling for it first with thumbs and fingers, and a voice growled in Tibetan:

"Silence!"

Narayan Singh had received my leave to go. He went like a whirlwind. Someone—very likely he—had loosed the ponies and they milled around the shed, while he clung to the mane of one of them. There was tumult in the dark, and then, in what seemed like a second, he was gone through the shed door. A voice I thought I recognized commanded in Tibetan:

"Go after that fool and kill him!"

It was like Grim's voice! Somewhere in the darkness close to me Chullunder Ghose recovered his stunned senses just sufficiently to murmur "Jimgrim!" Someone hit him on the

head again and he lay still. With four men holding me face downward I could only move inch by inch, but I contrived to get a glimpse of night sky through the open shed door and, against it, a man's figure. He was staring out into the night, watching the men who had pursued Narayan Singh. Even his figure looked like Grim's.

Cords cut my arms; men knelt on me and I was half-stunned—in no fit state to trust my senses but it was hardly likely I should not know Grim. A sort of madness seized me as the conviction grew that Grim had gone insane. I began to struggle, until a blow on the back of the head reminded me to lie still.

The man in the doorway laughed; and it was Grim's laugh. Presently he closed the door, but struck a match and lit a cigarette. Then instantly, by the flare of the match, I recognized him.

He was wearing Grim's clothes—native Indian khaki underneath a yak-skin overcoat. He came and stood over me, raising my chin with his toe, then struck another match to let me see him.

I hated him less for that indignity than for having made me think, for one mad minute, he was Grim. His beard was gone; the long black hair that he had worn over his shoulders when we saw him last had been tucked inside the yak-skin cap, but he was unmistakably the man who threw me backward in Sidiki ben Mahommed's house in Leh—the same of whom I dreamed between the gods' knees in the cave above the hall of stalagmite. His look of tigerish masculinity had vanished with the beard, but I could see he was taller than Grim, now that he stood naturally, and when he squatted down close to me, cross-legged, it was with the same effortless, slow movement as if he had been lowered by an unseen hand. He appeared to be proud of that trick.

"You were looking for Rait? You shall see him," he said.

He appeared to expect me to answer, and laughed cynically when I did not.

"I can read your thoughts more easily than understand your clumsy accent," he remarked in perfectly good English. But it sounded more like a boast intended to make me lose confidence in my own senses.

"You poor super-hypocrite!" he sneered. "You are not a typical example of the West, you are its archetype; you are its perfect specimen! You funny muscle-maniac! You straw in the wind of misdirected energy! You make me laugh, you poor, unpigmented, blind checker-on-a-board! Now listen:

"Your Jimgrim is done for. You were warned in the letter Rait wrote you not to bring him or that sabered imbecile,

Narayan Singh. You brought them in spite of the warning, so their blood in on your head. Not that it matters. The world is richer for the loss of two such fools.

"You are a bigger fool than either of them, and how we're going to smash the shell of your stupidity is something of a puzzle; however, we will do our best, and if you break up with the shell, it won't much matter.

"I gave you credit for being a bit less stupid than you are, and intending to trap you, I put on Jimgrim's clothes, at you don't know what disgusting inconvenience to me; they reek of his smug self-righteousness."

I lay still. The cord on my arms was slipping and I hoped to get a hand free and break his neck. But one of the men who was kneeling on me felt at the cord and tightened it so sharply that I winced.

"Ah!" remarked the man in Grim's clothes. "Pain is a great educator. If you had Rait's imagination we could make much more of you, I don't doubt. We tortured him mentally. You won't suffer worse, but differently. The result won't be so efficacious. To reach mind through the body is to lose by indirectness. We shall never be able to make more of you than an assistant for your friend Rait.

"How you do make me laugh! Now you lie there and believe you are enough of a man to hold out and to disobey us after we have finished schooling you! Rait thought himself too clever. You think yourself too obstinate. Well, you shall see what we have made of Rait in hardly any time at all, and that may help you to yield without quite so much suffering—although we don't believe in sparing the initiate. We stamp pain on the memory and kill out even the suggestion of a possibility of mercy.

"You are going to learn, in your degree, my friend, how true is your identity with Nature, who is red in tooth and claw and not the merciful, wise mother that the sentimentalists so moralize about."

He gave me the impression he was merely passing time until it was convenient to make his next move; and he confirmed it when the men returned who had been looking for Narayan Singh. They whispered to him and he gave a sharp command I did not catch.

Immediately the men who knelt on me began to kick and drag me to my feet and I heard others striking and prodding Chullunder Ghose. The babu cried out and someone struck him over the mouth. I called to him to play the man, but almost before the words were out one of my captors' knuckles struck me and made my lips bleed. I was dragged out

through the doorway and compelled to walk through the gap in the courtyard wall behind the man in Grim's clothes.

My captors were all monks in sheepskin overcoats and there were at least a dozen of them following me down the trail, so I could not see what happened to Chullunder Ghose though I could hear considerable noise; and when, at last, we reached the bottom of the long descent and halted near the chorten at the entrance it appeared that they had dragged him all the way down on his back with his hands tied and a rope passed through his armpits. The man in Grim's clothes prodded him until he stirred, then turned to me.

"Understand," he said, thrusting his face close to mine, "there will be no nonsense about sparing you. You're coming. You're coming on foot. Try to refuse and you will be tortured. You will not in any case be carried or allowed to die."

He began to search my pockets leisurely, transferring all their contents to a bag that one of his monks carried slung by a strap. When he found my automatic pistol he laughed as if it were a baby's toy and held it up for the monks to be amused at. One of them showed the pistol he had taken from Chullunder Ghose and another, seizing it by the barrel, cracked me over the shins with it.

Nothing hurts more on a cold night than a blow on the shin. My legs were not tied. I kicked him, putting all the lift into it that I could muster. It was not long before I wished I had controlled that impulse. Though I broke a couple of his ribs he was a tough, determined expert in malignity and all the pain the broken ribs caused he repaid to me twice over on the march, with greater will because the others laughed at him.

The man in Grim's clothes led the way, striding along as if leagues were yards. My captors ordered me to follow next, and the monk whose ribs I had broken took another man's staff to lean on, but used it more often to prod at my heels from behind—a species of torture far more irritating than the pain of the rope on my wrists. When I turned on him I was tripped with the staff, knocked down and then struck until I got up and resumed the march.

In the darkness twenty yards behind me more than a dozen monks were bullying Chullunder Ghose. They dragged him on his back until the agony of that awoke his stunned brain and he scrambled to his feet. Because he cried out then, they put a rope around his neck and jerked it, beating him when he stood still for lack of breath.

For a while the wish, inspiring faint hope, that Grim was not dead and might bring Lhaten and some of those other

mysterious individuals to the rescue, kept me from jumping over the dark edge of the ravine whose direction we followed. But the more I thought of Grim the more conviction grew that he had been killed. How else could the man in front of me obtain his clothes?

And as for Narayan Singh, what chance had he? The odds were ten to one that those who pursued him had found and killed him. He could not have hidden in the monastery. There was no way to escape except by that zigzag descent, on which pursuers would have the advantage of pursued all the way down. I did not doubt Narayan Singh was dead.

That pessimistic outlook once accepted, the exasperation of being prodded on the heels at every third or fourth stride nearly broke down reason. Death was tempting if for nothing else than that it would deprive my captors of the fun of torturing me further; it was infinitely preferable to the thought of being made mad to the extent that I would yield my will, which seemed to be their object.

There were a dozen places where I might have jumped off before the men who drove me could prevent. I even pretended to worse fatigue than I actually felt, in order to get them used to my sudden stumbling so that they should not jump too quickly to prevent me when I made up my mind—a thing that, when left to myself, I am habitually slow to do.

I am not afraid of death, although I have the ordinary healthy man's mistrust of suicide as any way out of a difficulty. The thought that Chullunder Ghose would have to face the misery alone if I should take that dark plunge to oblivion was what in the end prevented me. I decided to wait, and endure, and leave the problem up to him. If he should prefer suicide we would break through the veil of death together; if not, I could probably endure what he could.

Then I remembered Mordecai's brave break for liberty across the passes and it seemed to me that though he died before he reached home he had won a finer fight than any I ever took a hand in. I made up my mind I would endure until the end, whatever that might be, if only because Mordecai had done it.

Strangely, after that the thought returned that Grim might be alive and that Narayan Singh might possibly have found him. I could not imagine how Grim's clothes could have changed ownership without his being taken prisoner or killed, but even the uncertainty was better than the pessimism of despair, and I began to use caution not to go too near the edges of the yawning chasms that we passed.

Long before morning Chullunder Ghose made an attempt to kill himself. He had a rope around his neck which would

have hanged him or else dragged two monks to death along with him, if he had reached the edge of the ravine in time. But they were too alert. They threw him to the ground and beat him mercilessly, rubbing snow on his face and neck when he lost consciousness.

After that they tied the two of us together since the babu could hardly drag himself along, and they prodded me persistently and flogged me with the knotted ends of ropes whenever I tried to rest from the strain of supporting a man heavier than myself.

The man in Grim's clothes never troubled himself once to turn and look at us. He appeared to be sure his men would carry out instructions, and when the coldest dawn I ever knew began to color the surrounding peaks I caught only one glimpse of him, a mile ahead, after which he vanished.

By that time Chullunder Ghose was in delirium, moving forward almost automatically; all I had to do was to support him, but the little strength I had left was hardly equal to it. The prodding no longer hurt. What little landscape I could see was swimming in a mist of blood-red. I could not feel my wrists and supposed they were frozen, but did not care. I decided at last to lie down and be beaten to death, forgetting the man's threat that I would not be permitted to die; but it took thought an awfully long time to convert itself into action, and we reached a cave while I was still telling myself what to do. I felt as if I were talking to another fellow, whom I pitied.

The man in Grim's clothes waited for us near the cave mouth. I had lost my sense of direction and nothing seemed to stand still long enough for me to see it properly; the only thing that really registered in my exhausted brain was that Grim's clothes were too small for him and that he looked like a cad without his beard. He had a pointed chin, with a twist that I thought might straighten if I hit it hard enough; and his eyes, instead of being leonine, looked more like a hyena's.

"How is that for a beginning?" he asked.

He gave me a shove that sent Chullunder Ghose and me both sprawling on the cave floor. Then he stooped to examine my wrists and ordered one of his men to cut the rope and chafe them, but he did nothing to prevent the man whose ribs I had broken from continuing to prod me with the staff. I could not use my arms, and when I tried to kick I found I could not aim straight, which made them all laugh and they prodded me from every direction for the fun of it.

Chullunder Ghose was totally unconscious, lying on his face. The man in Grim's clothes produced what looked like a silver pocket flask from the bag into which my pockets had

been emptied, pulled out a wooden stopper with his teeth and, turning the babu over with his foot, poured a few drops of liquid on his swollen lips. Almost at once he began to recover and tried to sit up but was promptly knocked down again.

Then it was my turn. I was dragged to the rear of the cave and held while the man in Grim's clothes forced some of the liquid through my set teeth, driving his fingernails into my gums to make me yield.

"This is soma," he said when he had forced me to swallow a few drops.

The stuff was tasteless and had no noticeable smell, but its effect was almost instantaneous. My whole body became so perfectly at ease that I was hardly conscious of it and my brain became abnormally active. The red left my eyes. The cave, and everything in it, was as clear as if etched with a pen.

"Now think!" he commanded.

Instantly the journey from Darjiling, including Benjamin's store in Delhi, the Zogi-la, Mordecai, Sidiki ben Mahommed's house and every other detail, came to mind in one uninterrupted panorama. As in dreams, when there is neither time nor place and events occur simultaneously without being superimposed or intermixed, I saw everything in a moment.

I felt as if my will were bound with cords, exactly as my hands had been. It was agreeable to have that lucid mental vision, yet it felt like something stolen and a baffled impulse to resist it totally offset the feeling of exhilaration.

"Now you see," said the man in Grim's clothes. "Nothing has occurred of your volition. Rait wrote to you to come. You came. It would have made no difference which route you took; we would have caught you. Rait, who has ten times your capability, had to strive for seven years to find our lodge and gain admission. We made him work for it and spared him nothing. After there was nothing left in him that could even wish to play us false he had the right to choose his own assistant. He chose you, so those letters were written to tempt you to try to rescue him. We understand men's weaknesses. And now, if you have it in you, you are going to be made fit to go to the United States with Rait."

The stuff he had forced through my teeth had made me speechless. I had will enough remaining to resent his cocksure impudence, but not even the desire to speak.

"Now take this into your mind," he went on. "You are going to be hurt, tired until the senses lose control of you and what you have always believed is your own will dies forever. When all that nonsense about virtue has been dredged out—

you are going to be taught as much as you are capable of learning. You are to be a foil for Rait and that shall be the goal of your ambition. So until you yearn with all your faculties to be obedient to Rait there is going to be only enough peace and relaxation to make agony more keen by contrast.

"Mercy is stupidity, and there will be none. I will give you one hint how to ease the strain, because you may break under it otherwise and that fat Bengali you have brought with you would make a poor substitute. So remember: The agony won't last so long if you make up your mind to accept what is being done to you. Resign yourself to the inevitable, and begin to try to see the possibilities."

He strode away. I saw him talking to Chullunder Ghose. Gradually, minute after minute, pain returned and presently there came the monk whose ribs I broke, to prop himself against the cave wall and instruct three others how to torture me by prodding at my stiffened muscles.

The monks gorged themselves in a group, devouring meat like wild beasts, but the man in Grim's clothes stood alone with his back toward me, so that I could not see what he was eating. I began shivering with cold and every movement was like a knife stab because of the pain in my muscles, but a monk came and pulled off my overcoat, using a dagger to slit up the sleeves and save trouble.

After that the man in Grim's clothes fed Chullunder Ghose, and then me, telling half a dozen monks to hold me while he forced a measured quantity of filthy cheese into my mouth; it tasted as if mixed with axle-grease. When I spat the stuff out he scraped it from the floor and then got hold of my tongue, the way a horse is dosed, forcing the mess down my throat with his fingers while one monk held my head between his knees and another kept a rock jammed tight between my teeth.

My overcoat was then slit up with daggers and they gave me part of it to wear around my stomach, tying it in place with strips cut from the coat itself.

"That will keep you alive without making you comfortable," said the man in Grim's clothes.

At a sign from him they gloved my hands before they tied my wrists again. Then I was dragged on my back to where Chullunder Ghose lay and made fast to him by the knee and ankle, after which they kicked us to our feet and made us walk like men in a three-legged race.

They had given the babu something to restore vitality and he did not lean his weight on me so much as he had done during the night, but we were fagged out and so nearly

opeless that the thought of suicide again occurred—to both f us at once.

"Rammy sahib, let's jump!" he whispered. "There's a good lace."

There was ice on the edge of a shelf beside the track, that oped toward a sheer drop of a hundred feet, with naked ock below. It looked actually friendly and inviting. The ggestion we should make the jump together gave the touch f sympathy that makes men kin.

But we were too dog-weary to jump suddenly, and as we rned toward the edge the monks behind us saw what we tended. We were knocked down and belabored pitilessly ith blows ingeniously gauged to cause extreme pain without flicting too much injury. The man in Grim's clothes reaced his steps along the track to stand and laugh at us.

"Wait until you begin to want sleep!" he remarked as we ere dragged to our feet. "Then you will know what misery ."

He turned his back and led on, while the monk with roken ribs resumed his prodding with the staff. It was as if is words were a magic spell that opened a new door of rture. The desire to sleep stole over both of us at once, and ie incessant pain shot through the stupor like electric stabs, mpelling wakefulness.

At times we almost fell asleep and stumbled, but then lows were rained on us and we were brought back to our nses by the pain and the concussion. The worst of it was at our legs were tied together; we trod on the other's foot nless we kept up a torturing effort to keep time and swing gether, and each felt so sorry for the other that it was artbreaking to inflict an added injury.

The monks who followed close behind us noticed the care e took not to hurt each other and one of them, shoving us t of his way, ran to overtake their leader, obviously telling im about it, showing him in pantomime how each was ying to avoid giving the other pain. He merely nodded.

Later, when they let us rest under the shelter of a rock and e both fell asleep almost instantly, he had me awakened by bbing snow over my face. He let Chullunder Ghose sleep, t he sat down on a sheepskin with his face thrust close to ine and, leering at me, sneered:

"You will learn that pain and pleasure are two opposites of ie emotion. Therefore, you will inflict whichever you choose ith equal carelessness. Friendship and enmity being also pposites of one emotion, you will hurt your friends and othe your enemies. You will do anything except make a ol of yourself by being sentimental."

Chullunder Ghose's strength was so much less than mine that we had to rest repeatedly on his account; but that never happened until he actually dropped beside me and, his leg being fast to mine, I was unable to go forward. I have no idea what speed we made, or what distance we covered. It was a waking nightmare, in which I trudged over endless miles of mountain track, supporting Chullunder Ghose by a rope passed around him and over my shoulder.

I can shut my eyes now and see visions of the precipices that we skirted and of the slippery, ice-encrusted rocks up which we climbed, some of the monks tugging at me from above and others prodding from beneath. Chullunder Ghose has no memory of that march; he can hardly recall to mind the cave in which we spent the next night and where I was not allowed to sleep.

It was a cave where boiling hot and icy cold springs flowed out of the rock some fifty feet apart and blended into one stream near a ledge, over which they plunged into a gorge and froze among the rocks. They let Chullunder Ghose lie, but they stripped me naked and dragged me back and forward through the current, so that I was alternately chilled and scalded.

The effect was to rid me of pain for a while and to increase the craving for sleep. But they prevented sleep by tying me, stark naked, to a steam-wet rock above the hot spring; when I yielded to the sleep I slid feet-first toward the boiling water and was brought up with a jerk, just clear of it, by the rope under my arms. In that predicament I stayed until the dawn loomed in the cave-mouth through a veil of falling snow.

By that time I was sullenly obedient, aware that I would lose my reason if I wasted will on anything but clinging to the little reason that I felt I had left. Dumbly, in a sort of mental haze, I watched them beat Chullunder Ghose awake and feed him by forcing uncooked meat into his mouth, twisting his fingers until they nearly broke to make him swallow it. Then they made him drink hot water from the spring.

When my turn came I ate without resisting and the man in Grim's clothes seemed to misinterpret my obedience into a willingness to yield to him; or possibly he thought that I had no will left. I had not the ability to formulate a plan. I knew that if I should escape, it would mean certain death on a blind trail; cold, starvation or a false step would swiftly make an end of me. But by a sort of half-slumbering instinct, that felt like a maniac's cunning and frightened me, I discerned his weak point; he believed he had me conquered. Then I

knew—or I think I knew—how madmen feel who watch for an opportunity to play tricks on their guards.

Dissimulation was the keynote of it. I obeyed him when he ordered me to put my clothes on. With the thought, I suppose of testing me he came so close that it seemed a simple thing to kill him; but I knew he would never have done that if he had not felt perfectly sure of himself. I did not let even a glimmer of the hate I felt for him escape me. When he turned I saw a weapon like a blackjack in his right hand.

I pretended to be perfectly indifferent about Chullunder Ghose, standing silently beside him while they tied his leg to mine and seeming not to notice when they beat him until he yelled because he pulled his leg away when the rope touched the skin it had chafed the day before. When the babu spoke to me I did not answer. When the man in Grim's clothes kicked me as a signal to begin the day's march, I obeyed the signal without showing the least symptom of the rage I felt.

It was the babu's turn to bear the brunt of the exertion. He had had a night's sleep. Though his bruises tortured him and the cold wind stung his broken lips he had recovered something of his strength. He labored manfully to make my share of the exertion less, supporting me where I had previously had to bear the double weight and whispering, as often as he dared, such brief words of encouragement as he could summon from the depths of his own misery.

"This babu loves you, Rammy sahib— Be the sahib—All's well that ends well— Devil take hindermost— There is a gray cloud to every silver lining, so let us be brave— Am personally feeling better—oh, yes, much."

The thought that he was now the stronger brought out all the man in him and even helped his body to recover from exhaustion. Possibly they had given him something in his food to restore vitality, but it was manhood—the good stout stuff we white men like to think is our monopoly—that made him do his utmost to encourage me, by whispering at the risk of being beaten for it and by kicking my ankle to keep me awake, to save me from being beaten when I fell asleep. And when I did fall asleep on the march he supported me, not letting them discover it—until I stumbled and woke up again.

I never moved my lips to answer him. I was afraid that man in Grim's clothes might detect the slightest sign of sympathy between us and redouble his attempts to beat the spirit out of me. I merely walked ahead and took advantage of the babu's efforts, conscious, somewhere underneath the surface of my mind, of cunning in reserve and of a spark of hope that neither would explain itself nor die.

Chullunder Ghose weakened again before we finished that day's march. We climbed over the shoulder of a mountain where the wind blew so that we could hardly force ourselves against it. On the far side there was soft snow into which we sank to the knees, and that finished both of us as far as any further possibility of effort was concerned. We fell and lay still, though they beat us and at last, when the man in Grim's clothes ordered it, they tied a rope around the two of us and dragged us down the far slope, with another line tied to our feet to steer us by and hold us back. Our hands were tied, so we could not fend ourselves away from lumps of ice that lay across the path. Long before we reached the bottom I was stunned; but I remember, very vaguely, being lowered down a precipice head-first and swinging over chaos gray with whirling snow. I think I was still leg-to-leg with the babu, but neither he nor I are certain about that; we were both so near unconsciousness that our brains received no definite impression.

Bloodshed is a sin against the Lords of Life, but all too many cowards keep a good repute by cultivating peace that they approve not, though they fear war and avoid it. They, whose wisdom is as greater than my own as sunlight to a candle, have assured me that a brave man, though he slay, and though he slay his many, is a god in contrast to the men and women who slay not because their cowardice prevents them. Ye may know those by the malice of their tongues, which spare none, slandering to feed their own self-righteousness. But there are men and women who are so brave, that they fear not to refrain from slaying; them, if you should need friends, you will be reasonably safe to trust.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

JIMGRIM AGAIN. ELMER RAIT—AND THE DEATH OF NARAYAN SINGH.

I RECOVERED consciousness inside a place that looked as if it might have been a monastery, but there was not much left of it. I lay still, suffering acutely. Pain grew in proportion as senses awoke; I had no control over my muscles, every one of which was aching as if tautened on the rack. It was the feeling of underlying cunning, that I had experienced the day before, that kept me from crying aloud.

There were voices. I could see a broken roof above me, through which stars appeared. Below that there was a balcony without a railing; a long row of doorless cells gave on to it. The shadow of firelight and ascending smoke danced on an interior wall from which the plaster had fallen in flakes. I was lying on straw. There were lice eating into the scores of places where my skin was broken.

A shadow moved and I shut my eyes. A man leaned over me. A voice said in Tibetan:

"Are you sure you haven't gone too far? I should say he was dying."

Another voice, from somewhere near the fire, sneered arrogantly:

"Are you letting pity make a fool of you? The stronger he is physically, the closer he can go to death. The closer he goes, the easier it is to manage him. Come away, and mind your own business."

"But he is my business," said the first voice and I felt a man lean over me again.

I peered under my eyelashes at a face between me and the starlight, blotched on one side by reflection from the crackling fire, which made it appear misshapen.

"I want him. That babu might serve for a spy in India, but where I'm going—"

"You'll never go until you learn obedience," the other

answered. "If he has to be killed to teach you that lesson, killed he shall be."

"I beg pardon."

"There is no such thing as pardon. That is a delusion that the sentimentalists invented. Are you being sentimental?"

"No."

"Prove it."

"How?"

"Wake him up and show me where he keeps his tenderest emotions."

"Oh, that's easy. I was his partner. He is like a dog for friendship. He put up with more from me than a father would stand from his son, and when we dissolved the partnership at last you'd have thought he'd buried his wife and children. Hurt that babu if you want to see old Ramsden suffer."

"I have seen that. Show me something more acute."

"All right. I know how."

A hand took hold and shook me, shattering the pain through all my muscles like an overcharge from a galvanic battery. It was easy to pretend to wake up.

"Do you recognize me, Rammy? I am Elmer Rait." He was no longer handsome. When I knew him formerly his thin face had been finely chiseled—almost spiritual looking, pale, but with a mirth about the corners of the mouth and an irreverent impertinence about the eyes that always disarmed anger. There was not a fine line left. The surface had coarsened, in the way a drunkard's face does. The firm lips had slackened and the humor had all vanished from the corners.

But the Tibetan turban and the brown Tibetan cloak he wore looked natural to him, so that the change in his face was not so startling as it might have been. He was always a man who looked better in costume than in European clothes.

"Do you know me, Rammy?" he repeated, but the disgust I felt for him was like an anodyne that deadened pain; it did not make me garrulous.

"Well, you old fool," he went on, "you supposed I'd let you boot me out of partnership and not get back at you. You ditched me for that hypocrite Grim, and thought I'd let you get away with it. I knew you'd bring Grim; you'd have disappointed me if you hadn't. I warned you not to, simply to make sure you would, you contrary old ass. Grim talked you into giving me the gate, though you denied it at the time. I don't doubt you'll deny it now, but you're a liar. I know better. Your beloved Jimgrim was my enemy, and you led him straight into my trap."

I closed my eyes, to prevent him from discovering what

effect on me his speech was having. He mistook that for a lapse into unconsciousness and shook me, scattering the agony again through all my muscles. It was almost beyond endurance but I managed to keep silent.

"Your Jimgrim was caught," he went on. "He was stripped, and he was whipped. He was told—just to make him a bit more miserable—that you turned yellow and betrayed him to save your own skin. He died thinking you are on your way to India. Now speak to me or I'll have to hurt you."

He laid his hand on me, and I saw by the flickering firelight that hand and wrist were bleached like parchment. Observing that I noticed it he thrust the hand close to my face.

"I've been through more than you have; but they killed Grim. I ordered you to speak. You'd better."

He shook me and I could not keep from groaning. Vertigo sent the fire and the walls of the building in streams around me, in which Rait's face seemed multiplied a dozen times. I imagined I was hitting out at Rait, trying to use my last remaining strength to knock him backward into the blazing fire. I believe, as a matter of fact, that I lay absolutely still; brain and body were not functioning together.

"Crude!" said the voice of the man who wore Grim's clothes. "You have told him the truth and he thinks you are lying."

His face evolved out of the whirling fire and walls and when he touched my head the whirling stopped as if somebody had put the brakes on. I began to want to vomit.

"Rait," he remarked, "is such an amateur that he acts like a policeman with a witness. He is going to be shown how you can be made to tell things that are so deep in your consciousness you hardly know they exist. There!" he said, turning to Rait and continuing to speak English, "do you notice how he shuts his mind up like a tortoise pulling in its head? You must learn how to make him open it."

They walked away and I heard them talking in Tibetan over by the fire, but their talk was no more than an indistinct murmur. As cautiously as any tortoise I began to move my head to find out where Chullunder Ghose was, but the first man I saw was the one I had kicked; he was sitting propped against a pillar that supported the gallery. A number of monks sat near him, playing some kind of game with knucklebones, on a board between their knees.

On straw, between them and the wall, Chullunder Ghose was lying, and about two paces beyond his feet there was a doorway with a broken door; the lower half was more or less

intact but the upper half appeared to have been smashed in and there were three great gaps in the splintered woodwork, which framed three irregular sections of the starlit sky. I could see one star—a big one—and began to wonder which it was.

The star was suddenly obscured. I blinked, suspecting that one of the blows I had received on the head might have injured my eyesight. The star appeared again, and was again obscured, so I began to trust my eyes. I found that by enduring agony in every muscle I could move my hand so as to screen the firelight, and when I had stared at the star for about a minute I was nearly sure I could see the shadowy faint outline of a man's head between it and the splintered edge of the broken woodwork.

Instantly there returned that peculiar feeling of cunning, that had kept the life in me the day before. I have called it cunning, but there is no word I can think of that conveys that feeling of the stealthy approach of unknown agencies, resourceful and stored with surprise. It was not exactly confidence, but it was expectation. The nearest to it I can think of is the feeling one has at a well-played melodrama when the mine is laid, the fuse lighted, there seems no way out of the disaster and yet—down inside you—you are sure there is a secret, irresistible solution in reserve.

Rait got up from the fire and came to talk to me again, his back toward the door so that I could no longer see it; but the man in Grim's clothes by the fireside was in full view. He had let his hair down and was combing it, with loathsome motions more suggestive of a woman than a man.

"Rammy, old top, I believe I will save you," said Rait, "if you'll swallow your pride and just ask me to do it."

I knew he was lying. He had long ago surrendered his own will to that hermaphrodite who was combing his silky hair. Self-control is manhood and I felt toward Rait as I would toward a corpse of someone who had died of leprosy.

"You see, Rammy, I have made my goal," he went on. "They are teaching me things you've never dreamed of—things that can't be learned until you have dehumanized yourself. We're not allowed to fail at anything. If I don't persuade you to put yourself entirely in my power of your own will, they'll order me to kill you and I'll have to do it. But once you're in my power, and they're sure of it, I can do with you as I see fit. Yield, and I'll promise to release you afterward. You'll find it isn't any worse than taking anesthetic—not in your case—you're such a physical old specimen."

I did not dare to answer, I was so sure that any kind of answer would increase my disadvantage. Not imagining that I

could understand his method, I was none the less sure it included getting me to admit to myself that I was at his mercy. If I had argued, cursed him, or acknowledged the necessity of speaking to him, that would have opened a door in my mind through which he might insinuate some trickery. I did not reason it; I simply followed intuition and lay still.

He began to try the sort of blandishments he used to use in the old days when he wanted me to back him in some scheme I didn't like.

"I know your point of view is different from mine, but what harm will it do you to give in? Can't you be generous when it won't cost you anything? I'm not pretending you'd enjoy the life I'm going to lead, but you don't have to lead it and you'll save yourself an awful lot of agony by doing what I ask. I've got to make you crawl to me. These people insist on proofs before they'll teach any further; and they know things I've simply got to know. I'll tell you what, Rammy: you've had a raw deal and something's coming to you. Give in, and I'll not only release you afterward but I'll guarantee to use my stuff to help you in any scheme you like—no matter what it is."

If I might write down how I loathed him, what I wrote would burn the paper. But suddenly it occurred to me that even the sensation of disgust was dangerous—that it was like a poison gas by means of which, in some way that I did not understand, he might undermine my obstinacy and then overwhelm my will. I tried to pity him. I even tried to like him, summoning to mind the days when he had played the banjo to our gangs of niggers to keep them good tempered when we had to accomplish two days' work in one. In those days Rait had been a wonder around a mining camp and he and I together had accomplished things that other men thought impossible.

To avoid his eyes I looked up through the hole in the roof. He believed I was praying, and laughed.

"Do you still think your God is in Heaven?" he sneered. "Do you believe in miracles?"

At any rate, I did believe my eyes. Against the luminous, clear night sky I had seen Grim's face with firelight on it, looking down at me. It was but a momentary glimpse, but I was absolutely certain.

The man in Grim's clothes left the fire and came and stood beside Rait.

"You're an amateur," he sneerd. "I turned him over to you ready, but look at his eyes now. Can't you see the change in him? All my work would have to be repeated before you could hope to manage him. You'll have to kill him now.

Maybe that will strengthen your own will. Go on, kill him. If it weren't your first case I should make you use your fingers. You may use your knife, but do it slowly and so rid yourself of any squeamishness you have left. What are you—?"

His head split down the middle as a saber struck him from behind. He fell across my legs, and in his place there stood Narayan Singh, teeth flashing, eyes blazing, simmering with passion. His cheekbones stood out like a skeleton's. He turned on Rait.

"Hello, Narayan Singh!" said Rait.

He ducked as the saber swung for him. It missed and Rait leaped backward. He was instantly surrounded by the monks and I could see him groping with his right hand into the long cloak he wore. Then Grim came down by a rope through the hole in the roof and Rait fired pointblank at the two of them—missing, as invariably happens when a man divides his target. With a roar like a wounded tiger's, Narayan Singh went headlong at the monks. Rait swung the man whose ribs I had broken in between him and the saber and the point went home. Grim bent over me:

"How are you, Rammy? How's Chullunder Ghose?"

I was puzzled why he did not help Narayan Singh go after Rait. The Sikh had driven all the monks, with Rait cowering in their midst, out through the door and was standing on guard. The dawn was just beginning then to change the color of the sky.

"Are you two alone?" I asked.

"Not we."

Grim walked to where Chullunder Ghose was lying and made noises in his teeth. He tried to pick him up but Narayan Singh glanced over his shoulder and asked:

"Sahib, may we make haste?"

So Grim began to drag Chullunder Ghose toward where I lay, just as another pistol shot directed at Narayan Singh spat through the doorway and a bullet clipped the stonework of the upper gallery.

Chullunder Ghose was totally unconscious. Grim let him drop beside me and then ran toward a closed door on my left hand, underneath the gallery and nearly opposite that other where Narayan Singh stood guard. Grim was wearing an odd-looking costume, but I could not distinguish details. He picked up a heavy stone that had fallen from the gallery and began to smash the clumsy iron lock; it broke after a dozen blows and he opened the door, letting in a blast of icy wind along with the first gleam of sunlight. That door faced due East.

Then he returned to me, and as he stooped I saw he wore a turban made of dark brown silk.

"Can you crawl?" he asked.

I could not, but I told him I could, because I wanted to stay and watch Narayan Singh.

"Sure! Women and kids first—just like you, damn you!" he said cheerfully and took hold of Chullunder Ghose under the armpits, dragging him heels downward to the door under the gallery.

I remembered the bag then, into which all my belongings, including a pistol, had been thrown, and presently I saw it over near the fire. I called out to Narayan Singh that he would find two pistols in the bag, but he answered over his shoulder that he did not dare to leave his post to go and look for them. So I began to try to crawl, pulling my legs out from under the lifeless body of the man whom Narayan Singh had killed. It makes my flesh creep now to think of how it hurt to cross those twenty feet of floor. When I reached the bag and opened it at last there were no pistols in it—nothing but my watch, a little money and some odds and ends.

I warned Narayan Singh that the enemy had all the firearms, and as I spoke three shots spat through the doorway and struck slabs of plaster off the wall. The light was probably confusing to a monk unused to firearms.

Then Grim came for me and put his hands under my armpits from behind. I tried to resist. I could see a man with bow and arrows aiming at Narayan Singh and there were six or seven men with swords and daggers ready to pounce on him if the arrow should hit the mark. I told Grim to go and help Narayan Singh, but he began dragging me across the floor toward the door under the gallery. An arrow whizzed within six inches of me, and the next thing I remember we were outside in a bitter wind with the sun shining straight in my eyes.

I was lying on a smooth rock with my back toward the building from which Grim had dragged me and it was extremely difficult to see because of the blinding sunlight on the snow and because my head was swimming, but I got my bearings presently.

The building we had left was on a sort of island—a sheer-sided rock that rose from near the middle of a deep ravine. I could not see beyond the ruined building, but on the side on which I lay there was a narrow natural causeway, resembling a vein of quartz, that formed the only means of access to the flank of the ravine, where it seemed to disappear into a tunnel. The causeway was irregular and there

were ice and snow in patches all the way along. Midway Grim was carrying Chullunder Ghose, staggering under the weight.

In the ruined building there was the sort of noise that comes out of a slaughterhouse. A moment after I had turned myself slowly in that direction Narayan Singh came out, wiping his saber on somebody's turban. He had no scabbard. He stooped over me and asked whether I could hold the saber, but doubted my ability, so he passed the blood-smeared turban through the hilt and tied it to my waist. Then he hoisted me up on his shoulders, and I was glad he had tied the saber on; the pain would have made me let go of it.

He began to carry me along the causeway and I fainted again, I believe, from the agony caused by the jerky movement and from my own efforts to lie still, head downward over his shoulder.

At any rate, there is a lapse of memory until I discovered myself lying on an ice patch midway along the causeway—possibly two hundred yards away from where we started. I was facing the ruined building, so I could see comparatively clearly, with the sun behind me.

My view was from between Narayan Singh's legs. He had resumed the saber and had turned at bay against seven men who were advancing cautiously, their leaders rather hanging back but unable to retreat because the others pushed them forward. Then I heard Grim's voice:

"All right, Narayan Singh."

I was lifted from behind. Grim never was a weakling, but it puzzled me how he had found the strength to do that.

"Sorry if it hurts," he grunted.

He began to carry me, but turned to see whether Narayan Singh was following. He was not; he was facing the enemy, hilt high, his saber looking like a beam of sunlight. The advancing monks were sheltering their eyes under their left arms.

"Retire, Narayan Singh!" Grim called to him, but the Sikh did not move.

"Go thou, Jimgrim sahib!" he shouted back. "There comes one with a pistol."

I could see a man advancing slowly; he was nearly midway between the monks and the commencement of the causeway, framed exactly by the open door a hundred yards behind him.

Grim began to set me down, using time and thought to do it carefully, for I am no lightweight.

"Will you come, or shall I come and make you?" he demanded.

"Nay! I see Rait!" the Sikh answered.

In a second he was charging straight at the advancing monks. The first three flinched and tried to turn, but there was no room to pass the four who blocked the way behind them. They struggled. One slipped and fell over, screaming as he somersaulted through the sunlit air. Then the Sikh was into them and five more went after the first, the saber licking out like lightning stabs. The last one turned and ran, throwing his weapon away and picking up the skirts of his long cloak.

"Now come!" Grim shouted. But Narayan Singh went in pursuit.

The man with the pistol opened fire and at the third shot hit the monk, who toppled backward and went headlong into the ravine. A fourth shot whistled close to Grim and me. The man was dazzled by the sunlight; he kept bending his head to right and left, shielding his eyes with his left hand. Narayan Singh raced forward and Grim started after him, shouting to him to stop, but before he had gone ten paces the Sikh turned, waved his saber and shouted:

"Rait! I have him!"

He ran on again along the causeway. Rait reloaded and took aim, but the sun glared off the ice and off the quartz-like rock and three shots in succession missed, one splintering the ice near Grim's feet. Then a fourth shot hit the Sikh and staggered him.

His answering shout went echoing among the crags:

"Rung ho!"

Rait fired again. I think he hit a second time, but—up—through his forearm—through the throat—and out behind his head the saber went with one of those long lunging thrusts for which Narayan Singh was famous.

"Rung ho!" came the echoing shout again. Narayan Singh clutched air, fell forward on to Rait—writhed—slid—and the two went over, separating as they plunged into the abyss.

Grim glanced up at the sky after a moment.

"Vultures already," he said.

Then he stood still, looking down into the abyss, but someone fired a rifle at us from the ruined building and a group of monks came out through the open door. So Grim said nothing, but hoisted me up on his shoulders again and made all haste toward the tunnel mouth at the causeway's other end—slipping, staggering, stumbling—ten times over we were closer than a hair's breadth of the edge—and when he laid me down at last in echoing darkness he collapsed beside me.

Then I heard a voice in Tibetan: "Gently! Very gently!" I was lifted and laid on a litter, and for a long time I was

conscious of a litter swaying under me and of the footfalls and the steady breathing of the men who carried it. Somebody covered my face with a cloth after a while and I believe I slept.

I dreamed about a ladder I was climbing—miles high and exactly upright. As I climbed, the lower rungs fell one by one, so there was no way down again. When I reached the top there was nothing there except blue sky and I stood swaying in the wind.

I began to lose my balance, until Grim leaned through the blue above me with an outstretched hand and called to me to jump.

I could not make it, and the last rung of the ladder began cracking underfoot.

My son, when you have come to a decision between right and wrong, then act, not waiting on approval. If you do right it will add no virtue to the right that friends gave their assent beforehand; rather it will give a false friend opportunity to strengthen his attachment, so that ultimately you may listen to him to your own undoing.

If you do wrong it will harm you not at all that enemies rejoice, since proper motive will preserve you in the end and it is well to have our enemies uncovered.

Be your own judge. But commit no trespass, watchfully remembering that where another's liberty begins your own inevitably meets its boundary.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE HERDSMAN'S HUT.

I AWOKE in a herdsman's hut. A gale was blowing and crisp snowflakes fell through a square hole in the roof into a yak-dung fire that burned on a stone hearth underneath it. I was lying against a partition that divided the hut down the middle; men were talking on the other side of it in low tones, but it was difficult to hear because of the blustering wind, and equally difficult to see because the smoke explored the room in clouds before a little of it found its way out through the hole.

I tried to raise myself but had the sickening experience of feeling too weak. My mouth tasted as if I had been made to swallow medicine, and for a while I was still confused by the vivid dream from which I had awakened. Gradually, however, recollection came, and not long after that I began to distinguish Grim's voice, near my head, between me and the end wall. He was talking English.

"All the same," he said, "I should like to tell Jeff why you could not help us more definitely than you did. When Jeff comes to he will learn that your men brought litters, waited for Narayan Singh, and me to rescue him and the babu, and then carried them all the way to this place. And I know my friend Jeff. He will ask why you could do that but couldn't help in the actual rescue. I'm not questioning your actions; I'm simply asking what to say to him."

"Tell him the plain truth," said Lhaten's unmistakable voice. "You may say we don't take life for any reason."

There was a pause. Then Grim resumed:

"He'll take my word for that, I don't doubt. But, as I say, I know him; he will feel as sorry about Narayan Singh as I do—very likely worse. He isn't demonstrative but——"

"I know," Lhaten answered. "He loves his friends, but he hasn't understood yet that death strengthens friendship rather

than reduces it. We all die. We all meet again—some of us with fewer limitations and more knowledge. It was no harm that Narayan Singh should die fighting. Better that than be killed in a brawl or in an unjust cause, as so many soldiers die. Rait undoubtedly would have shot you and your friend Ramsden if Narayan Singh had not prevented."

"What makes you sure of that?" asked Grim.

"Knowledge," said Lhaten. "If you think a minute you will know too. Did you ever know a criminal to spare old friends who are ashamed of him? He hoped to be the perfect criminal, yet in his heart he knew he had neither the intelligence required for that nor yet the courage. He was in the hands of little dugpas, of the sort who aspire to be big ones but lack imagination. Those are as jealous as snakes. Their whole venom is jealousy and they had poisoned what was left of him. He hated you and Ramsden because *he* had failed. Didn't you hear Ramsden talking in his sleep—how he cried out that Jimgrim had died believing him an untrue friend? I don't doubt Rait had told him that."

"Well," said Grim, "when Ramsden wakes up he will ask why, if you and your brotherhood know so much, you didn't protect us all from those black rascals. He'll say it was strange that you let me be knocked down and stripped before you stirred a finger, and still more strange that you let them be taken prisoners and carried off. What shall I answer him?"

"The plain truth."

"I don't know the truth of it," said Grim, "except that certain individuals have been kind enough to order you to protect us in all ways possible."

"In all ways possible," Lhaten's voice repeated. "But would you ask a musician to make inharmonies in order to teach music to you? Or must you think in terms of music before the musician's thought can reach yours?"

Grim seemed to be thinking that over. When he spoke at last I could almost see him smile:

"Do you think that explanation would be any use to Jeff? He likes his eggs fried on both sides, with the date on 'em."

"If he can't understand, he must fail, that is all," said Lhaten. "Like any true musician, or poet, or sculptor, we are always doing our best to stir humanity. But artists can only reach such people as respond to the artistic impulse; others seem to look, or seem to listen, but the art means nothing to them and they either mock or misinterpret. We think thoughts. We breathe out principles. The dugpas interfere in every detail of the lives of those whom they have in submission—and the poor fools call it luck, or the act of God, or

providence. You see, the dugpas have persuaded a great number of people that neither they, nor we, exist; so, although crime, madness, suicide and discontent are on the increase, they who have authority ascribe it to all causes but the right one. Nevertheless, you may have noticed that benevolence and altruism and a spirit of inquiry also are increasing, in quantity as well as quality. That is because it makes no difference whatever what a man's religion or his politics may be; a principle is universal, and whoever apprehends one lives it, or begins to live it—until presently it bursts the bonds of his religion or his politics, exactly as a tree root bursts the rock in which it grew. It is the object of the dugpas to prevent men from grasping principles. I assure you, those were very little, unimportant dugpas who had caught Rait and who attacked you; they were like the criminals who murder at the bidding of the unsuspected hierarchies that infest civilization."

"Well and good," said Grim, "we all know there are master criminals who hardly ever get caught. But what am I to tell Jeff Ramsden? If I should ask him he would go the limit. His religion is friendship, if you can call that a religion. He would rather see a friend through to a finish, even when he doubts the outcome, than turn aside and make a profit on his own account. I don't want that. I would rather he should see the thing as I do and go forward on his own responsibility."

"Every man goes forward on his own responsibility," said Lhaten. "There is no escape from it. But no two healthy men think quite alike, or there would be no such thing as independent judgment. We never interfere with anyone unless he reaches out to us. We could not help Rait. We could not even help that splendid man Narayan Singh—at least, not much—so long as he depended on his saber. Don't you see that to help a man win saber fights is to increase his faith in sabers? We prefer to guide that valor and integrity into much more profitable channels; but how shall we guide unless the individual is willing to be guided? We are not dugpas, who compel obedience. We are like musicians, who play harmonies for you to follow if you can; and just as, let us say, Beethoven could not compromise with those who did not understand him, or who detested his music, neither can we compromise. It is for you, or for anyone else, to agree or not as you see fit.

"I shall try to explain what happened. When you were in that monastery talking to the yellow lama you appealed to me."

"I did not," Grim retorted.

Lhaten laughed: "Didn't you think of me?" he asked.

"Yes. I wished like the deuce you were there to explain why we were led to that place and how to get away."

"That opened a line of communication. I could reach you. I sent you a warning, but you did not understand it entirely; in fact, you hardly understood at all. What you did was to get up to go and explore. It was a most emphatic warning against violence, because violence is the dugpas' specialty, at which they can beat you easily. If you should win by violence against them you would merely play into the hands of other dugpas, who are worse than they. So I warned you against violence. But how did you interpret it?"

"I received no warning," Grim answered.

"No? What did you do at the door of the stable?"

"I told Narayan Singh to stand guard outside, and I gave him my pistol."

"Why?"

"I hadn't used it for a long time. He had asked to look at it the day before. As he was going to stand outside I thought he might as well employ his time."

"Why did you leave him outside?"

"Impulse. No sense in two of us going in. I preferred to know exactly where he was, in case of need."

"Do you realize that if you had kept your pistol you would certainly have used it? If you had taken him into the stable with you there would certainly have been a fight. The noise would have brought Ramsden and Chullunder Ghose into the trap, and the outcome would have been much worse than it actually was. It was bad enough anyhow. Why didn't you cry out when you shut the stable door and struck a match and knew you were surrounded?"

"It flashed on me that they would kill Narayan Singh the moment he should open the door. It was better to leave him outside to join forces with Jeff Ramsden."

"That decision saved you," Lhaten answered. "Do you remember what happened next?"

"Not clearly."

"Well, they knocked you on the head and you had sense enough to lie still. Otherwise they would have killed you. They dragged you to that pile of sheepskins in the corner and lifted you up through a hole in the wall, that was almost entirely hidden by the shadows and a transverse beam. Up there in the hole they stripped you naked. And it was there that I found you later on."

"Where were you while this was happening?"

"Too far away to have come to your help one second sooner than I did. Remember, I am nothing but a chela. I am

not so limited as you in some respects, and I knew there was serious danger, so I warned you of it, meanwhile hurrying to get as near you as I could. Remember, I am not allowed to oppose violence with violence because that defeats its purpose; my effort was directed to induce you to rise above it.

"I tried to reach all four of you. There was a woman in the monastery who was being employed to stir up Ramsden and Chullunder Ghose. The dugpas work on the principle that if you irritate you will get action and the action will follow the line of least resistance. Ramsden was the man they wanted. They weren't so foolish as to think that women could inveigle him; they simply made use of her to irritate him, and presently Ramsden, Chullunder Ghose and Narayan Singh all walked into the trap."

"What saved Narayan Singh that time?" Grim asked.

"Fidelity. The man's sole thought was how to save his friends' lives. Even fighting can't entirely smother that fine motive. It enabled me to reach him; and I think I reached Ramsden at the same time; Ramsden was probably thinking of nothing but how to find you and protect you from the trap. Ramsden ordered Narayan Singh to go and find you if he could. The Sikh obeyed him and fell down a well in the dark, so his pursuers missed him. The well was not very deep but the rope was slippery with ice, so it took him nearly an hour to climb out."

"Do you mean you foresaw that?" Grim asked.

"Not I! No more than a musician foresees the effect of music on an audience. He merely plays the harmonies. Emotion does the rest. Have you not seen a beaten regiment stirred by half a dozen bugles and a drum until it rallies? That is the crudest possible illustration. True music appeals to the inner more than to the outer ear; it stirs that spirit in a man that catches inspiration. And the force I have been taught to use is ten times subtler than the rarest music. Let it only reach a man in a moment when his finest thought is active and it will rend the veil between him and his own reality. Then he will do the right thing always—even if it means that he shall tumble down a well!"

"You saw him die," said Grim.

"There was a thought of hatred then. He hated Rait. He wanted his revenge on Rait. I could not make him hear. Did you try?"

"Yes. He disobeyed," Grim answered.

"Nevertheless, he very likely saved your life and Ramsden's. There are deaths much less magnificent than that," said Lhaten.

"Ramsden will want to know," said Grim, "why you could

furnish stretcher-bearers and could come that long way with Narayan Singh and me, but could not lift a finger in the actual work of rescue. He's a whole-hearted old dog. He doesn't like men who appear to him to sit on fences when the issue is in doubt. I think I understand you, but I'm pretty nearly sure I can't explain it to him."

"Ask him then," said Lhaten, "whether, if he should wish to stop a dog fight, he would get down and fight like the dogs with his teeth. And if not, why not? He will say he knows better. He is likely to admit that he would lose the whole advantage of superior intelligence and would find himself on a plane where the dogs were his masters. Does a fireman go into the fire? Does the conductor of an orchestra play all the instruments—even though in his day he has had to play many of them? Does the architect lay bricks? Does the poet set type? And if he who tends the beacon light should leave it to direct the rescue, who could see? I am no match for the dugpas if I try to fight them with their weapons. Each of us must use what he can to best advantage, and there is deadly danger in another's duty, just as there is duty in another's danger. When Ramsden wakes ask him whether he had any sensation of power in reserve while he was in the dugpas' hands. I did my best to stir that consciousness and once or twice I think I reached him."

They were silent for a long time after that. Outside it blew a hurricane that shook the roof, beating the smoke back through the hole and filling the hut with a stinging blue cloud. Hail and snow sizzled on the hearth and Grim went and stirred the fire to keep it from going out, heaping on dry yak-dung to protect it. He came and looked at me, but I pretended to be sleeping.

"How far are we from the goal?" he asked when he sat down again.

"If you mean geographically, about six days' march," said Lhaten. "You have already come a long way into Tibet. The elevation here is sixteen thousand feet."

"Am I going to be allowed to make it?"

"Yes. You."

"What about my friends?"

"That is not my business. I can't answer you," said Lhaten. "You might get there with your friends. Two explorers have passed near it within comparatively recent years. You would see no more than the explorers did—a very plain, uninteresting village, occupied by plain, uninteresting-looking people. There are no barbed-wire entanglements! But seclusion is something the Masters know how to preserve. I have authority to lead you in alone; and in that case you will be allowed

to stay a while—perhaps for quite a long time. But if you insisted on taking your friends without authority, you might exclude yourself."

"Can I obtain authority?" Grim asked.

"It may be. But I don't know and I promise nothing. No man is ever taken in on any other terms than on his own initiative and entirely of his own free will. So that would be Ramsden's affair."

"And Chullunder Ghose?"

"The same."

For a long time Grim was silent—for so long a time that I began to think he had left the hut without my knowing it. But at last I caught the familiar grunt that he makes when he has considered all points of something and rejected it.

"I shall not go in without my friends," he said.

"Is that exactly fair to them?" asked Lhaten. "You impose on them responsibility for your success or failure."

"No, I don't," Grim answered bluntly. "I know damned well Rammy wouldn't make that grade and leave me, if positions were reversed. He'll lie about it, naturally. He'll even try to quarrel, if all else fails. It won't be his fault if I don't go on and leave him. It will be my independent judgment as to what I personally care to do. That settles it. All three of us, or none!"

"Let me see—who was it settled that the sun goes round the earth and that the earth is flat?" asked Lhaten. "You will find," he added, "that your friend Ramsden has been listening to every word we have said."

Grim got up to come and test the truth of that remark; but Lhaten went out, letting in a hurricane of wind that blew all the fire off the hearth before the door slammed shut again.

So Grim had to gather up the fuel and relay the fire before he could attend to me, and I had time to think what I should say to him.

And though ye strive in friendship, be that friendship as ennobling as the gods' good will, I tell you ye must enter one by one. But of the three, faith, hope and friendship, I declare the last is not least; nor without all three shall ye draw nigh the skirts of Wisdom.

—From THE BOOK OF THE SAYINGS OF TSIANG SAMDUP.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

JIMGRIM AND RAMSDEN ENGAGE IN ARGUMENT, AND COME TO TERMS.

GRIM pulled up the yak-skin bench and sat beside me. Due, I think, to the tremendous elevation and, perhaps in part, to the recent torture I had undergone, the edges of thought, if I may coin an expression, stood out definitely. There was no confusion between yes and no. Physically I was weaker than I ever remember to have been, but thought was sharp and vivid—concentrated. The essentials were obvious.

"Rammy, old top, is it true? Were you listening?" Grim asked me. "Now see here: you and I have stuck together, and as a general thing you have left the leading up to me. Damn you, you've been too lazy to argue. You'd rather work like a locomotive to prove me right than go to the trouble of disagreeing. We never have disagreed, and we're not going to this time. But here's a crisis and it's your turn to decide which way the cat jumps. Do your job."

"How is Chullunder Ghose?" I asked him.

"Rotten. But he'll pull through. Lhaten brought some medicine."

"Can he talk yet?"

"No. But look here, there'll be no committee work on this. If you say 'forward,' forward we go. And if you don't like the prospect of spending perhaps three years in a Tibetan village, learning stuff that will upset all your previous conclusions—after which we'll probably be turned loose to be hated like hell by half the men who used to like us—just say so and we'll turn back. For that's all there is to it."

It was clear enough what Grim wanted to do. His eyes almost gleamed through the smoke.

"If this were poker, any fool could tell you held four aces," I remarked. "Do you guarantee to accept my decision as final?"

"If you play fair," he answered, "yes. But none of your concessions to my prejudice. What I've got to know is, what would you do if left to yourself—supposing I weren't here, for instance. If you don't convince me that you're answering on the level, I shall vote to go back."

His eyes were fixed on mine and it would not have been any use to try to shift ground. On the other hand, no argument of his was going to make me stand in his way. He was aching to go to Sham-bha-la. So was I; but I had less chance of getting in than he had, and was much less likely to be able to understand the mysteries that I supposed would be explained if we should gain admission.

"When we agreed to enter Tibet, we all took the same chance, didn't we?" I said at last. "Narayan Singh lost out, as you or I might have lost out, just as easily. Now, once again: will you accept my answer?"

But he put me through a third degree before he pledged himself, endeavoring to probe for mental reservations. In the end, because habitually I had never tricked him, he committed himself:

"Shoot!"

"Forward," I said, "as soon as Chullunder Ghose is fit to travel; and the devil take the hindermost. Whoever makes the grade, goes in. Whoever doesn't make it, goes home."

"Damn!" he exploded, then laughed at himself. "I might have known you'd turn the trick on me. All right. But I've a trump left. I shall leave you and Chullunder Ghose whenever Lhaten asks me to, and shall go on alone with him, as he proposes. Once there, I shall ask for admission for both of you. If they refuse, then I won't go in either and we'll all three turn back."

I told him he would be a damned fool to refuse for any such reason.

"If they won't let me in," I argued, "I'll go back to the States and wait for you. If they turn you into something that's too wise for me to understand, I'll get my fun backing you, nevertheless. Besides," I said, "I've salted down some money and you haven't. Knowing something, as you will, you'll certainly be branded as a nut and you'll need all the support you can get, in addition to someone big enough to punch the heads of your opponents. From what I've seen and heard," said I, "they'll teach you to abstain from violence, but they'll fill you full of stuff that will exude from you and start explosions wherever you go. You'll need someone who isn't a pacifist, to break the heads of bigots. That's a job for

ne. And I'll help to keep the women from suing you in court /hen you refuse to accept them as soulmates."

I could no more make him yield than he could make me, nough I threatened to take him by main force as soon as I ould recover strength and throw him into the Sham-bha-la itch, to be fished out by the chelas as an act of charity. He romised to go forward. He refused to make the goal unless 'hullunder Ghose and I might make it with him.

Lhaten kept coming and going, though I have not the emotest notion whence he came or whither he went at such egular intervals. As a doctor he was almost a magician; he eminded me of a physician whom I once met at Baroda /hen bubonic plague was playing havoc in a camp of famine efugees; he was a man who had not graduated with distinc- .on, and who had no professional prospects because he did is thinking for himself and doubted all the doctrinaires, but nost of his patients recovered, whereas most of those whose ick submitted them to other ministrations died. The man ad the healer's gift—and so had Lhaten.

He was silent, nearly always, but his silence was something ke that of the red man, totally devoid of surliness, suggest- ng that he had so much to think about that talking was a 'aste of time. How he kept himself clean was a mystery. At iidday, when the sun would burn the skin of anyone xposed to it, tea would freeze in the kettle within fifteen inutes after it was taken from the fire; washing, conse- uently, was a questionable luxury and the Tibetans who ccupied the portion of the hut that was cut off from ours by ie partition were as filthy as might be expected. Lhaten even /ore clean clothes, which usually smelt of sandalwood. He nly laughed when I asked him how he managed it.

Once, I believe, Rao Singh came, although I would not wear I was not dreaming. At that elevation, for reasons oubtless natural, but of whose nature I have not the remot- st notion, dreams were as vivid and sharply etched as /aking thought; so that it was difficult at times to draw the ne between the dream and actuality. I can remember con- ersations that I thought I had with Grim, though he assured ie afterward that I was sleeping and had not talked during leep.

We both thought Rao Singh came into the hut, but we did ot agree as to how he behaved, so it is possible that both of s were dreaming, though that both should have the same ream with mere minor variations as to detail, seems unlike- /. Grim said Rao Singh was wearing a turban; my version of was a loose fur cap. We both agreed about his eyes, which

were as blazing blue as when we saw him in the herm cave, and if there is anything in the theory that people d dream color that alone ought to settle the question. How er, I am usually disbelieved when I assert that all my drea are colored vividly, so I must leave the issue undecided.

As I recall it, no wind blew in through the door when was opened and admitted Rao Singh. On the contrary, Gr declared there was the usual midmorning gale and Lhat had to force himself against the door to shut it. We we both sure there was snow on Rao Singh's coat, but differ about what boots he wore and as to whether he spoke Lhaten in Tibetan or some other language. Grim thought used Tibetan; I am nearly sure he spoke Hindi. What certain is, that Grim and I both understood him, or belie we did—which adds to the weight of evidence in favor of t dream, since we understand people in dreams without defi ing what language they use.

He said to Lhaten (Grim and I agreed about that) "Y should not waste energy. Too much is worse than too litt Exactly enough is the proper quantity." Then he examin Chullunder Ghose, who had been more or less unconscio for ten days and was lying babbling in a sort of half-deliriu under sheepskins that he threw off constantly.

"Can't you reach him?" he asked.

"No," said Lhaten. "I could reach that other, but n him."

"You strike too strenuously, and you don't go de enough," said Rao Singh. "What did you follow?"

"His affection for his friends."

"No use. It leaves off at the head. His heart is sou enough, but when the brain sees disadvantages the he prevails. His brain is full of terror. Calm that."

"I have tried, but he becomes afraid of me."

"He is dreaming of nothing but dugpas. The whole u verse seems full of evil to him. He has been badly poisone Get into his dream and let him see that what he fears is b the other side of what he loves. Make haste."

What Lhaten did then neither Grim nor I discovere although we were almost exactly agreed, afterward, abo the conversation and we both saw Lhaten sit down by Ch lunder Ghose's head. Thereafter, Rao Singh monopoliz attention, striding over to us where we sat together on t yak-skin bench, our backs against the wall.

And that is another circumstance in favor of the drea theory. I may have been too weak to stand, but I cann imagine that Grim would have remained seated if he h

been awake; ordinary manners would have made him stand up. When we discussed it afterward, Grim was as sure as I that both of us remained exactly as we were.

Rao Singh stood still and looked at us, his penetrating blue eyes dwelling first on Grim's face, then on mine. He was not exactly awe-inspiring; he impressed one much too favorably or a sense of awe to creep into the feeling, which was rather of confidence combined with inability to understand him. There was no vanity about his dignity, no condemnation in his frown. When he spoke after several minutes he began in the middle of a sentence, as if he had been talking to us since he came into the hut:

"—So you think it matters what is said of you, or what is done to you. But I tell you, nothing matters to you except what you think, and what you do to other people. If you expect praise for what you do and adulation in return for what you think, you may just as well give up thinking, because the world will only praise what pleases it and will only tolerate what does not cause it the necessity to think. It stifles thought with ostracism and with bayonets, and then flatters itself how wise it is. How wise are you?"

He smiled, stood silent for a moment, and then went away and left us.

Neither of us spoke. I dare say it was twenty minutes before Grim asked whether I remembered just what Rao Singh had said and we began comparing notes. It first occurred to us it might have been a dream when we found that we did not agree as to minor details. Even then we did not dare to interrupt Lhaten, who was motionless in meditation near the babu. But when Lhaten moved at last and stood up Grim asked him whether Rao Singh had gone for good, or whether we might expect him again presently.

"From Rao Singh you will never know what to expect except benevolence," he answered.

So I put the question bluntly: "Was he here, or was he not here?"

He looked at me a moment rather keenly and then answered:

"Before you will ever know much about Rao Singh you will have to learn not to discuss him. Not that it injures him in any way, but gossip is a rolling stone that runs downhill. Many a man who was climbing uphill has been hit by that stone and discouraged or else hurt. Some, who are nearer the bottom, where the stone has much more impetus, are crushed."

"Were we awake or asleep?" I asked.

"My back was turned," he answered. "Sleeping and waki
are relative terms. Very few people indeed are awake at a
until they die. Your friend Chullunder Ghose is feeling be
ter."

What shall it profit a man if he know more than he can ɔssibly perform? Or if he can do more than he understands? e moderate in all things, so preserving equilibrium, which is form of justice that the gods love.

—From The Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

CHULLUNDER GHOSE.

CHULLUNDER GHOSE recovered slowly and suffered mor than we did from the altitude, but from the moment h consciousness fully returned he seemed to have the sam experience, of thinking, as it were, in high relief with all th mental images appearing rounded and solid instead of fl and spectral. Plus was plus; minus was minus; there was n borderland of doubt between them.

Unexpectedly he grieved over Narayan Singh, whom h had urged us not to bring on the expedition and with whon he had never arrived on terms of intimacy.

"Sahibs, I was jealous of that Sikh. I loved him. He was fighting fool, as sure to go off as a stick of dynamite. I wa afraid of him. I hated his way of sitting by a fireside wit that little hone and sharpening his saber. But I would give a I have to be able to wear such blinkers as he wore, and t have such firmity of purpose. Firmity of purpose—ah! T understand too much and see too much is my infirmity, sin I see all around a thing. I see absurdities, where other me see only opportunities for valor. Sahibs, knowledge is dreadful handicap. I envied that man Narayan Singh h blindness; he could not see the absurdity of things, and so h died a hero. But I fear me, I shall die in bed, which is of a abominations the least tolerable because it is the essence o expectedness and almost any fool can do it."

We remained three weeks in that stone hut on the grim white, wind-swept shoulder of a mountain, eating food tha Lhaten and his men provided from I don't know what sourc and recovering strength slowly but without relapse. Lhate would not hear of our moving on before I was fit to mak long marches, although he made no such stipulation as re garded Chullunder Ghose.

"For if our starting should depend on him, we might stay ere a long time," he remarked as he eyed the babu sharply.

Chullunder Ghose, I thought, seemed disappointed by that ecision. Announcement that Lhaten's men would carry him roused no noticeable satisfaction. He was not ill-tempered, ut he wore an air of martyrdom when Lhaten's men at last rought in the litter and he was hoisted shoulder-high by four reat smiling stalwarts who made nothing of the weight and nly moved with greater dignity beneath it. He waved an most tearful farewell to the hut.

I walked beside him for a while, until the track grew arrow and too rough for anything but single file; and it ccurred to me to ask him why he had shown such affection or the hut.

"I bade good-by to all romance!" he answered. "Sahib, we re going to where they will teach us the truth about all our usions, and I have too few illusions as it is!"

He had some, nevertheless, though I am not quite sure hat shape the most attractive of them took. At the end of ree days' exhausting struggle with the wind over a moun- in trail that followed the line of a watershed, we started to escend toward a river that we learned from Lhaten was the sang-po. The following afternoon we entered a hermit's ve, about a hundred feet above the river that came thun- ering through an ice-encrusted gorge around a turn a mile vay on our left hand, widened and shallowed in front of the ve but flowed too rapidly to freeze except along the banks, nd plunged over a cataract a mile below us. Over beyond e river was another range of mountains, snow-clad, and ith no trail visible.

Either Chullunder Ghose imagined he could swim that ver, or else he suffered from the equally ridiculous delusion at we would let him drown himself. He climbed down to e water's edge by rough steps hewn in the rock, and the nly reason why I followed him was that I wanted to study e rock formation where a buttress of the mountain jutted it into the stream. Suddenly Grim shouted from the cave outh—pointed—and I saw Chullunder Ghose struggling in e river as the ice-cold current swept him toward mid- eam.

There was nothing in sight that would float and I had to nge in after him, cursing his bad manners, for the water illed the very marrow in one's bones and, though it was no sk to overhaul him, it was desperate work to reach the ck-staked shore across that current. Ice froze in my hair as swam, and I could hear the thunder of the cataract grow

louder as I caught the babu by the neck of his cloak, pulle
him over on his back, and tried to turn toward the bank.

It was impossible. The only chance we had was to g
forward with the current in the hope of being thrown up o
an ice-covered beach across the river; and we never coul
have reached that if two men had not put out from th
farther side in a sort of coracle made of inflated skins whic
they let out by a rope made fast to the shore and, paddlin
furiously, guided across our course. They hauled us into th
unsteady craft and let it swing down current by the rop
until it struck the ice at the edge of the beach, where i
bucked and swayed and we had to jump toward ice stron
enough to bear our united weight, whence we dragged th
coracle, with the babu lying in the bottom of it, to the beac
and safety.

Then we ran, dragging the babu with us, and lay breathles
on a cave floor by a drift-wood fire while four men stripped
us naked and rubbed warmth into our bones. Another drie
our clothing at the fire.

It was an hour before Grim and Lhaten came, since they
had to wait for another coracle to work its way across th
river for them. And by that time it was dark. Grim said
nothing, but sat down beside the fire when he had noticed I
was not much worse for the experience. The Tibetans who
had rescued us sat near him with the firelight on their faces
making them look like disembodied spirits framed in the
flickering gloom. Lhaten paced to and fro with his hands
behind him, paused after a while and, looking at the babu
said abruptly:

"So. Well, we have crossed the river."

That was the only comment any of us made. In less than
half-an-hour, before supper was ready, Chullunder Ghose
was in delirium and raging fever. Lhaten brought snow and
packed him in it, alternating that with sheepskins, motioning
the rest of us away, requesting silence and taking his place at
last, cross-legged, near the babu's head. There he remained
the whole night long, except that once or twice when I
awoke I heard him ordering one of those Tibetans who had
rescued us to bring more ice. In the morning the fever was
less and the babu was breathing easily but still unconscious.
Lhaten told us we must march at once, but added, pointing
at the babu:

"Don't question him. Don't speak of it. That sort of fear is
like a sleeping snake. If you stir it, it strikes."

That day's march was the hardest of them all. The litter
bearers had to pass their load from hand to hand up naked
cliffs where there was hardly a foothold and the wind blew

such a gale that sometimes there was nothing possible to do but cling with hand and toe to the projections and wait for a lull. There was a *couloir* where the sky looked like a patch of smooth glass resting on the summit of the walls and, as we climbed, infinity appeared to yawn beneath us. Once, between the ridges of a parallel escarpment, we passed through a tunnel of snow and ice, through which the sun shone as if through heaps of jewelry. And there was one descent, of a mile or more, on sheet ice that we had to break for a foothold. Lhaten led, pausing only to pay attention to Chullunder Ghose.

It was sunset when we reached this cave in which I am now writing. It is a long cave with two entrances that are very nearly at a right angle, and at the angle's apex, facing the cave's interior, there is the tall, carved image of a seated man, who rather resembles Rodin's *Thinker,* except that his features are Asiatic and his figure like an Athenian's of the time of Pericles. He is carved from a block of marble that crops out from betwen retaining walls of porphyry. The rest of the cave is partly porphyry and partly limestone.

There, that night, we slept, dog-weary. In the morning Lhaten said that Grim should go with him, but said he did not know how long Grim was likely to be absent. He offered to leave two Tibetans, one to tend the fire and cook for us, the other to help me with Chullunder Ghose, adding that a messenger would come at intervals with food and medicine. So Grim and I restated the terms of our bargain, argued a little about it and shook hands. I haven't seen him since he strode away across the snow, two paces behind Lhaten.

There is a sort of altar in the middle of the cave, half-marble and half-porphyry, as smooth as glass except where broken, and the floor around it has been worn smooth by the tread of countless feet, although it does not seem to have been used for centuries. I got up on the altar and sat there after I had watched Grim vanish over the horizon, and for a while a sense of abject loneliness swept over me. The cave felt like a sepulcher. The cold, and the wind moaning in through the double entrance added physical discomfort. I began to feel as though I were going mad. I even went to the cave mouth with the thought of hurrying after Grim and calling him back to reconsider things but returned determined to control myself by giving full attention to Chullunder Ghose.

He had no fever. He was lying in a sort of comatose condition, conscious, perfectly aware of me and of what had happened recently, but apparently unwilling to speak. I felt inclined to kick and shake him to arouse his will, but remem-

bered what Lhaten had said about fear. I did not want to kick him into kingdom come or to terrify the reason out of him. Lhaten had restored his physical condition; he was breathing naturally and his pulse, if anything, was too quick. It was fear, it seemed to me, that had him by the brain and I wondered why Lhaten had not found some means to relieve it.

There was nothing else for me to do but occupy my mind with him and I began to try to think of ways of stirring up his will, to make him think of something else than what obsessed him and begin to talk. For a while I sang—all the idiotic songs I could remember—even danced, clowning for him as I used to do for men in mining camps to get them in a reasonable humor. But though I grew warm with the effort and recovered something of my own equanimity, it was afternoon before I found the way to manage the babu.

I sat down where he could not see me, near his head, as Lhaten had done, and began to moan. I haven't cried for thirty years, but I can sob behind my hands like a Worthington pump with an overload and valves that need repacking. I can sound like a man with a broken heart and a cow with her throat cut moaning a duet. I kept that up for fifteen minutes, until at last the babu's voice said very wearily:

"What is it, Rammy sahib? Are you also hopeless person?"

I pretended not to hear him and sobbed on, inserting a crescendo bar or two suggestive of hysteria. At last he sat up.

"Rammy sahib, let us make clean breast of miserable business!"

I sat in shadow, so he could not see I was dry-eyed, and in another minute he himself was crying, the tears streaming down into the coarse black beard that had made him hardly recognizable.

"Rammy sahib, I am miserable babu!" he exclaimed. "Oh, would that I had died the way the Sikh did! I cannot go forward. I shall not submit to being made to see more clearly than I do. Yet, if I turn back I am self-confessed coward! Furthermore, how can I turn back? How shall I reach India, alone, alive? As a corpse I should no longer interest myself. And if I should succeed in reaching India, I should despise myself, because you and Jimgrim treated me as fellow man and yet I failed you. On the other hand, if I go forward they will teach me the reality of things, of which already I know much too much! It has been bad enough as failed B. A. to stick my tongue into my cheek and flatter blind men—pompous Englishmen and supine Indians—for a living. I have had to eat dust from the wheels of what the politicians think

is progress; and I have had to be polite when I was patronized by men whom I should pity if I had the heart to do it! And I could endure it, Rammy sahib, because I only knew more than was good for me and not all of it by any means! I do not wish to know more. If I saw more clearly I should have to join the revolutionaries—who are worse than those they revolute against! It is already bad enough to have to toady to the snobs on top. To have to agree with the snobs underneath, who seek to level all men to a common meanness since they cannot admire any sort of superiority—that would be living death! I would rather pretend to admire the Englishman whose snobbery exasperates me, than repeat the lies of Indians whose only object is to do dishonestly and badly but much more cleverly what the English do honestly and with all the stupidity of which they are capable!"

I suggested that wisdom, if that should prove to be the essence of Sham-bha-la's teaching, almost certainly would counterbalance revelation of the dismalness of things with knowledge of effective remedies.

"No, no!" he almost screamed. "No more! Wisdom only makes the heart ache. For a babu with a wife and children ignorance is the best condition. But you also were weeping, Rammy sahib. You must tell me why you wept."

I told him the plain truth about it: that I had pretended, in order to get him to talk. At that he threw himself down on the blankets in abject misery, beating the floor with his fists.

"Krishna! How I wish I had refused to come with you!" he shouted. "Then I should have suffered only from regret. But now what shall I do? WHAT SHALL I DO?"

I went and climbed back on the altar, and sat there until one of the Tibetans came and cooked our supper at a small fire over in the farthest corner of the cave. I did not know what Grim would have to say to the determination that was forming in my mind and setting there as solidly as concrete. It was growing clear to me that I had neither right nor inclination either to compel Chullunder Ghose to go another yard with us or to desert him. Yet I knew that Grim would not desert me. I was torn between unwillingness to rob Grim of his goal and obligation, as clear as daylight, to stand by a man who had done nothing to forfeit our friendship.

"I will take you back to India," I said at last. "I don't know how. We shall have to ask Lhaten for guides and provisions. I will wait for Grim in India if we can persuade him not to come back with us."

During that night and the following day Chullunder Ghose spoke only at rare intervals. There was something he was turning over in his mind, but whenever he tried to speak of it

he always checked himself and seemed to go back to his thinking. He was silent when, at sunset, a man came into the cave and handed me a note from Grim, scribbled in pencil on a leaf torn from a memorandum book.

"All right, Jeff. Come forward. I am waiting in a guest house and can see our destination from the window. I refused pointblank to go another yard without you, but I never was so keen on anything in all my life. However, the bearer of this, who is *somebody,* will doubtless do his best to scare both of you off the lot, so summon all your resolution, put the spurs into Chullunder Ghose, and come soon. J. G."

I read the note by firelight and then looked up at the man who brought it to me. He was tall, straight, robed in yak-skin, bearded, neither a Tibetan nor a Rajput. He resembled Michelangelo—or John Singer Sargent's painting of Moses. It was difficult to see him in the firelight.

"You may come," he said in sonorous English, "but neither may the bird return into the egg nor you resume your former ignorance. I warn you: stay away, if you have any hunger for the life you knew."

I answered, I had found the world quite good enough for me but Grim was much the best thing in it, so that if I should have to choose between losing Grim or all my other friends I must decide to go with Grim.

"But I've a friend here," I added, "who needs looking after and who prefers to turn back. Consequently, I must turn back. Will you kindly tell Grim——"

I paused, for I hardly knew what he should tell him. It was no use lying. I suspected he would not consent to take a lying message, anyhow. I asked a question:

"Was there something about willingness? Lhaten said——"

"Your own free will," he answered.

"Then will you kindly tell Grim I have been refused admission on the ground that I am not entirely willing. Say that I shall wait for him in India, and that I hold him strictly to our bargain, the terms of which were that we should all three try to enter and the devil take the hindermost."

For about a minute he was silent and his face in firelight took on something of the expression of that *Thinker* carved in marble near the entrance of the cave. Then:

"Speak! Which way do you prefer?" he asked, in a voice like no man's I had ever heard. He did not speak loud. Neither is an earthquake loud. I answered:

"I should rather go with Grim, but——"

Chullunder Ghose spoke up, crying aloud to call attention to himself, then bowing three or four times, Hindu fashion—

seated cross-legged, that is, and repeatedly raising both hands to his forehead.

"Pranam!" he exclaimed in Hindi. "This babu has come a long way, seeking—seeking."

"What have you sought?" asked he who stood beside me.

"Nameless one, my heart is seeking what this head denies!" He beat his head with both hands. "My heart is a lion. My head is a jackal. There are these two sahibs who have never stooped to be my fellow men; they have never imagined me anything else. Not stooping, they have seen me as their equal. Shall I undeceive them?"

"Let the heart speak."

"Shall I show ingratitude?"

"Strip the heart bare."

"How shall I repay them?"

"He who asks repayment—nay, I tell you, he who will accept it, is a victim of illusion. That which has been given, is not given if the giver can retake it. He who looks for his reward receives the ashes of his own gift. As the sun sends forth his rays into the dark, thus only shall a man give of his manhood. There is nothing else."

"Holy one, give me, then, of your manhood!" said the babu; and the man beside me smiled as if he liked that answer.

"Can the jackal kill the lion?" he retorted. "Not until the lion is caught in a trap, when none the less the jackal fears to kill him, saying 'Whence will come the carrion I preyed on?' The lion is the heart that hunts. The jackal is the head that whimpers and yelps and guzzles dead stuff that the lion leaves. What says your heart?"

"I am unwilling to betray these sahibs. I am the man they trusted."

"And the head?"

"I am afraid."

There was silence then for longer than a minute, while the babu sat swaying himself in agony of indecision. The firelight shone on beads of sweat that stood out on his forehead. Holding the wall to support himself, at last he stood up, standing very straight for a man recovering from sickness.

"I am afraid," he said, "but I shall face fear. I will go alone to India. I say, I will. If Ramsden sahib wishes to return with me, he shall not. I will not permit; for I will rather kill myself than keep him or Jimgrim from their goal. That is all. I will return alone to India."

He sat down and collapsed, laying his head on the rolled sheepskin that served for a pillow.

"You will return. Who said you will return alone?" the man beside me asked.

"My head—my head. It aches!"

"Aye, aches because the heart has beaten it! Lhaten shall go with you to Darjiling. When your head says you have thrown away what you might have had, your heart shall answer: 'You have given.' For without you, your friends would have refused to enter; and yet with you they could not have entered, because none may come but of his own free will."

"Then good-by, Rammy sahib," said the babu, rather piteously, doing his best to sit up and to smile. He tried to hold his hand out, but collapsed again. I told him I would stay with him until he should be fit to travel, never mind how long that might be; and as I said that, another thought occurred to me.

"They must be secrets that are told where Grim and I are going—very well-kept secrets. Shall I ever be allowed to write about them, or to talk of them?" I asked.

"Then they would not be secrets," said the man beside me. "What is known in the heart cannot be spoken by the lips. What you learn, you will live; what you think, you will do; there is no other way."

"But until then I am in no way pledged to secrecy?"

"In no way."

So I asked him for paper and pens and an inkpot, which he sent by messenger in two days' time together with a fat brass tube with caps at either end in which to pack my manuscript. And ever since, for nearly four weeks, while Chullunder Ghose recovered from his illness, I have sat here at the porphyry and marble altar writing what I can remember of our journey.

He who brought the paper told me that Grim had gone forward as soon as he heard of how the babu's difficulty had been solved; so I suppose when I get there that Grim will be, as usual, a dozen or more jumps ahead of me in comprehension. But I would rather keep my eye on Grim's back than be neck-and-neck with any other dozen men I know.

It is an hour after dawn and wind is blowing like a whip-lash through the entrance of the cave. Chullunder Ghose is well, and ready for his journey. I shall send this manuscript by his hand to Will Hancock at the mission near Darjiling, and if Will decides that it is fit to see the light of day in company with his books on the Pentateuch and what not else, he has my leave to publish it or to send it along to another friend of mine, who, having no board of trustees to censor his activities, may see fit to stand as its sponsor. If he

does so, he is warned that he will run risks, since a reputation for veracity depends on making such assertions as the public thinks are true. I can hardly expect him to believe what Rao Singh said: that it makes no difference what people think of you, or what they do to you. The only thing that matters to you is what you think, and what you do to others. If he should by chance believe it, I can hardly hope that he will act on it; so probably this manuscript of mine will never see the light of day.

I have been warned that somebody will come for me this morning, and that I shall have to go at once without keeping him waiting. I have given to Chullunder Ghose an order on my bankers that he seems to think not niggardly. He copiously overestimates the value of this manuscript and is as proud as Lucifer to be entrusted with its delivery.

He is standing beside me, waiting to insert this last page into the tube. He dislikes some of my quotations of his speeches, but has promised faithfully to deliver every sheet untampered with to Hancock.

Now I hear them coming——

* * * * *

There is a big black blot here and the manuscript ends abruptly.

ED.

THE END

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